

TEAR DOWN THE VEILS: FRANCIS BACON'S PAPAL VARIATIONS 1946-1971

by

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“Tear Down the Veils: Francis Bacon’s Papal Variations 1946-1971,” a thesis prepared by Kimberly Yuen Hong in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of Art History. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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Twentieth-century British figurative painter Francis Bacon (1909-1992) is perhaps best known for his near-obsessive series of papal paintings inspired by Diego Velázquez' renowned portrait *Pope Innocent X* (1650) and created over the course of Bacon's entire artistic career. The artist's working process plays a crucial role in understanding this celebrated and varied series. Bacon deliberately avoided Velázquez' "original" portrait, preferring instead to work with photographic reproductions of the piece alongside a large collection of seemingly disparate visual material in his chaotic studio at 7 Reece Mews (South Kensington, London, England). This thesis proposes that Bacon explored issues of mechanization, fragmentation, and repetition through these visual juxtapositions in order to offer a critique of artistic and religious institutions.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During the last year, Francis Bacon's Post-World War II figurative paintings traveled as a part of the first major retrospective since the artist's death in 1992. The show began at the Tate Britain in September of 2008, then moved to Madrid's Museo del Prado in February of 2009 and will end its tour later the same year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>1</sup> Growing international attention, in both the academic art world and the financial art market, illustrate the continuing influence of Bacon's oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> While Bacon's prominence grew in the 1950s and 1960s, new discoveries about his artistic practice made within the last ten years have led to

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Until the recent economic recession in the United States, post-war and expressionist Western art auctions experienced record sales. However, it should be noted that these high sale prices led to heightened expectations for continuing art auctions. For example, Christie's Post-War London auction in November of 2008 estimated a forty-million dollar sale of Bacon's 1964 painting *Study for Self-Portrait*. Unfortunately, the bidding ceased at under twenty-eight million dollars. For additional auction results please see the websites of Christie's, Sotheby's and Phillips. Bacon has also been at the fore of legal disputes. After his death, the Estate of Francis Bacon filed a lawsuit against the Marlborough Gallery. In 2000, trustees of the Estate claimed that the Marlborough Gallery took excessive financial commissions on the artist's work, produced lithograph prints of Bacon's work without the artist's consent and without compensation, and failed to account for up to thirtythree of his paintings. After years of legal dispute, the Gallery settled and returned several paintings and documents to the Estate. For more information regarding this legal dispute see Carol Vogel, "Gallery Accused of Cheating Prominent Artist," *The New York Times* (March 22, 2000); Terri Judd, "Heir's illness ends the battle between Bacon's estate and his gallery," *The Independent, London* (February 2, 2002); and Carol Vogel, "Bacon Estate and Dealer Settle a Two-Year Suit Over Pricing" *The New York Times* (February 2, 2002).

additional publications, research, and projects devoted to the artist.<sup>3</sup> Chief among these was the donation of Bacon's studio to the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery in Dublin, Ireland by his lover John Edwards.

In August of 1998, the Hugh Lane relocated and painstakingly catalogued over 7,000 objects found in the artist's studio space at 7 Reece Mews, South Kensington, London (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> Margarita Cappock, the project's head coordinator, published *Francis Bacon's Studio* in 2005.<sup>5</sup> The book outlined the scope of the relocation and presented images of the studio and some of its contents. The Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery's venture resulted in an extensive and detailed database accessible to scholars and a permanent exhibition open to the public.<sup>6</sup> Martin Harrison's 2005 book *In Camera: Francis Bacon, Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting* focused on issues of process and mechanization linked to the Hugh Lane Gallery undertaking.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It seems that many art-historical findings on Bacon, like many artists, have been revisited after his death. Bacon died of a heart attack in 1992 while vacationing in Madrid, Spain. Much art-historical and mass-media texts published on Bacon during his life were informed by Bacon himself. Bacon interviewed frequently, and often to friends in the art world. While his words provide interesting insights into his process, artwork, and intention, they also complicate his oeuvre and practice. As discussed throughout this thesis, Bacon self-fashioned his public identity through these interviews.

<sup>4</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery created a website that documents the kinds of materials found within the studio and background information on their process. To visit the site, please see [http://www.hughlane.ie/francis\\_bacons\\_studio.php?type=About&heading=Artist%92s+Materials&rsno=1](http://www.hughlane.ie/francis_bacons_studio.php?type=About&heading=Artist%92s+Materials&rsno=1). For books on Bacon's studio consult John Edwards, *7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001); Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (London: Merrell, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> I refer to information found from the database as Hugh Lane Database.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Harrison, *In Camera: Francis Bacon Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005). This text was particularly important to my thesis. Due to the importance of Bacon's process materials (to his work and my own), I researched the Hugh Lane Gallery Francis Bacon database for information on Bacon's range of sources and iconographic links in his papal series. I am grateful for the time and energy given by their staff, particularly Jessica O'Donnell and Patrick Casey, who helped me navigate the database and personally showed me the collection.



This thesis builds on and relies upon both the Hugh Lane Gallery's and Harrison's findings regarding the artist's process, but focuses on Bacon's appropriation of Diego Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* (1650) (Figure 2). From 1946 to 1971, Bacon referenced photographs of the Baroque portrait in his series of papal variations. His fixation resulted in forty-four known paintings such as *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) (Figure 3) and *Study (Pope Pius XII)*(1955) (Figure 4). The papal variations are of notable importance within Bacon's oeuvre because the artist did not repeat any other subject as frequently as the popes and revisited the topic over the expanse of his career. Additionally, given Bacon's strong interest in figuration and appropriation, his papal portraits act as a set of prototypes due to their direct engagement of the artist's idiosyncratic working process. Seen as such, Bacon's papal variations are some of his most signature paintings.

By focusing on artistic practice, I hope to avoid sensationalizing the artist's biography (such as his sexuality, his bohemian lifestyle, and his tumultuous personal relationships, particularly those with his family).<sup>8</sup> Through a visual examination of Bacon's series of popes and their context, his artistic process (in particular the documents he appropriated from), and his own statements, I analyze how his papal portraits function for a contemporary audience. This thesis, as the first in-depth study of all of the portraits, proposes that Bacon's papal variations explore issues of mechanization, fragmentation, repetition, and originality. In so doing, the artworks

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<sup>8</sup> Many texts have given dramatic accounts of Bacon's life, for some of these see Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Century, 1993); Andrew Lambirth, "The Painter as King." *The Spectator*, 4 November 2006. My thesis does look to Bacon's biography for information regarding his process but does not attempt to conduct a psychoanalytic analysis of his life in order to learn more about his work.

problematize the tradition of papal portraiture, the genre of figurative painting, and the identity of religious and artistic institutions.

Although Bacon's papal variations are arguably some of his most well-known works; they have not been fully examined as a comprehensive group.<sup>9</sup> This gap in scholarship overlooks the pope as a major theme in Bacon's painting and the papal portraits' position as an exemplification of his unique artistic process in painting. To remedy this problem, my work consulted texts concerning Bacon's tropes and appropriation of works of art, such as Gilles Deleuze's thematic investigation of Bacon's paintings, Hugh M. Davies' writings devoted to the papal portraits of 1953, and Brendan Prendeville's examination of Bacon's appropriation of Vincent van Gogh's figurative painting.<sup>10</sup> Monographs by Michel Leiris, Michael Peppiatt, and Ernst van Alphen provided a significant research foundation necessary for understanding the artist and his work.<sup>11</sup> Bacon's interviews conducted and published by David Sylvester and

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<sup>9</sup> Hugh M. Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*, exh. cat. (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2001) includes a brief text that focuses on the 1953 works and gives a cursory understanding of the papal variations as a unified group. The lack of study could be due to the difficulty of grouping the breadth of the papal variations. Bacon's works, including the papal variations are not easily categorized and evade clear answers. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze makes a call for the kind of research necessary for understanding Bacon's popes urging, "We cannot simply compare the two portraits of Innocent X, that of Velázquez and that of Bacon, who transforms it into the screaming Pope. We must compare Velázquez's portrait with all of Bacon's paintings." Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 46. Currently, Harrison and the London-based Estate of Francis Bacon are reworking Bacon's catalogue raisonné The Catalogue Raisonné Committee was formed in November of 2006 and includes Martin Harrison, Richard Calvocoressi, Hugh Davies, Norma Johnson, and Sarah Whitfield. Dr. Rebecca Daniels is also assisting with research for the project. I am eager to see how Harrison and the Estate organize Bacon's works, especially the papal portraits. Ronald Alley and John Rothenstein, eds. *Francis Bacon* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964). Since this volume has yet to be published, my thesis relies on Ronald Alley and Sir John Rothenstein's 1964 catalogue raisonné for accurate titles and dates for Bacon's paintings.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*; Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*; and Brendan Prendeville, "Varying the Self: Bacon's Versions of van Gogh." *Oxford Art Journal* 27 (2004): 23-42.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and In Profile*, trans. John Weightman (Barcelona, Ediciones Polígrafa, 1983); Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (New York: Farrar, Straus and

Michel Archimbaud provided additional information regarding the artist's possible intent, self-fashioning, and artistic practice.<sup>12</sup>

My first chapter, "Bacon Bits: Understanding Francis Bacon's Papal Variations as a Series," introduces the papal variations and groups them into thematic and chronological typologies. While many compositional and iconographic similarities between the papal variations exist, there are also significant stylistic, iconographic, and compositional differences. For example, the papal variations use approximately the same size canvas, but Bacon varied the color of the papal vestments by using blue, purple and red. Iconographic markers throughout Bacon's oeuvre such as animals, raw meat, tassels, eyeglasses, and arrows appear in some of the papal paintings but not in others. This chapter argues that the papal variations juxtapose conventional visual devices and objects found in earlier papal portraits with dynamic fragmented photographic images collected within Bacon's studio. These juxtapositions in Bacon's papal portraits complicate the perceived identities and notable characteristics of the Pope, Catholic Church, and humankind.

My second chapter, "The Papal Portrait in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Bacon's Artistic Process in Painting His Papal Variations," discusses Bacon's working method, namely his employment of the medium of photography. Bacon used mechanization in a variety of ways to produce his paintings. He referenced and

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Giroux, 1996); Ernst van Alphen, "The Narrative of Perception and the Perception of Narrative," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 483-509; and Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>12</sup>Michel Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation* (London: Phaidon, 1993); and David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987).

appropriated reproductions of a variety of images as inspiration. Often, Bacon collected multiple reproductions or leaves of the same image or kind of visual document. Toward the middle of his career, he composed and commissioned photographic material to serve as models for his portraits.<sup>13</sup> Bacon preferred to work from two-dimensional material and memory rather than from a live sitter.<sup>14</sup> The camera, the process of mechanization, and issues of repetition are therefore foundational to understanding Bacon's art. This chapter analyzes critical texts related to photography and issues of originality written by Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard in order to understand the importance of Bacon's use of fragmentation and repetition.<sup>15</sup> In so doing, it proposes that Bacon's sole use of photographic reproductions of *Pope Innocent X* permitted the artist to see permutations created by mechanization, remove the painting from its initial context, and complicate the role of the "aura."

The final chapter, "Pushing Conventions of Tradition: Bacon, Velázquez, and the Art-Historical Canon," analyzes the relationship between Bacon and other artists included in the traditional art-historical canon, most significantly the seventeenth-century Spanish court painter Velázquez. By examining the history of the casual seated papal portrait type originating with Raphael's depiction of Pope Julius II (1511) (Figure 5), I will place Bacon's papal variations in and against the genre of "official" papal imagery. The pope's body occupies a unique position in visual depiction. The pope's

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<sup>13</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*.

<sup>14</sup> Wieland Schmied, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1996), 87.

<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980); Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); and Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press: 1995).

identity is a complicated mixture of tradition, institution, individual human being, spiritual intercessor, and religious and political leader. This chapter examines Bacon's appropriation and alteration of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, and the strange spectatorial effects of the pope's gaze out toward the viewer.<sup>16</sup> This chapter claims that Bacon's papal variations build on a pre-existing history of figuration, in particular the tradition of seated papal portraiture. Through a visual and curatorial dialogue with these pictorial conventions, Bacon intensifies the intimacy and power dynamics between the pope and the viewer.

Bacon said in regards to successful art, artists and the visual portrayal of truth, "Great art is always a way of concentrating, reinventing what is called fact, what we know of our existence— a reconcentration, tearing away the veils that fact acquires through time. Ideas always acquire appearance veils, the attitudes people acquire of their time and earlier time. Really good artists tear down those veils."<sup>17</sup> I believe that great art historians do the same. This thesis aims to follow Bacon's mantra by "tearing away the veils" surrounding his art and practice, namely those interested in sensational biography and even those fashioned by the artist himself.

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<sup>16</sup> Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Hugh M. Davies and Sally Yard, *Francis Bacon* (New York: Abbeville, 1986), 110.

## CHAPTER II

### BACON BITS: UNDERSTANDING FRANCIS BACON'S PAPAL VARIATIONS AS A SERIES

#### General Background and Bacon's Interest in Figuration

Beginning in August of 1961 until his death in April of 1992, Bacon accumulated a wide range of images and texts in his infamously chaotic studio and home at 7 Reece Mews in South Kensington, London (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The items therein were central to his artistic process and oeuvre because they served as source materials for his paintings.<sup>2</sup> Scattered through his small studio lay photographs of Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies, on top of reproductions of artworks, newspaper clippings, paint rags, empty butter bean cans and champagne bottles, film stills, and color plates documenting medical ailments. In this mess, Bacon lived and worked for most of his artistic career.

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<sup>1</sup> Bacon's behavior of collecting large amount of visual material and books occurred prior to his residence at 7 Reece Mews. However, multiple moves during his early career discourage further discussion of these sites at 19 Cromwell Place, the Hotel Imperial at Henley-on-Thames, and a summer residence in Tangiers. Bacon stayed at 9 Overstrand Mansions at Battersea for six prior to his move to 7 Reece Mews. Images of his Battersea studio and home look very similar, in terms of clutter and materials, to his South Kensington residence.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Peppiatt and Martin Harrison refer to the materials found within Bacon's studio at 7 Reece Mews as working documents. I continued to use this term because it illustrates their multiple functions as a research archive on Bacon as well as active process materials for the artist. The working documents do not have clear names and often appear in multiples. I chose to name with the designation working document and a number. The numbers do not refer to Bacon's chronology of collecting the image. The time that Bacon selected and placed the working document in his studio is unknown.

The majority of Bacon's work takes the form of figurative oil painting. He frequently depicted friends, lovers, and himself, in addition to taking the occasional commission for a portrait.<sup>3</sup> Art historian Hugh M. Davies wrote of Bacon's innovation within the genre of figurative painting: "Yet while extending the timeless tradition of figuration, he invented profound and startling new ways of portraying people as he distorted the inhabitants of his painterly world in order to unlock the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently."<sup>4</sup> Bacon's papal variations fit with Davies' claim that the artist reinvented a kind of modern figuration. His papal portraits continue in the tradition of figurative painting; however, his artistic process, choice of subject, and expressive figures provide the necessary framework for his audience to experience the human form in a more sensorial manner.

To create a painting, Bacon predominately worked from photographic studies of the human body, and his memories and photographs of people he knew well. Most-often, he compiled fragments from his massive collection of source material. After consideration of the range of interview statements, paintings, and scholarly interpretations, it can be concluded that Bacon's interest in figuration was grounded in issues concerning the perception of reality and the subject's sensory effect on the viewer. His exploration of portraiture and figurative work continued throughout the entirety of his career. While Bacon's painting style changed throughout his life, many of his themes and tropes stayed the same. For example, he painted figurative triptychs, portraits of friends,

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive understanding of Bacon's figurative work consult Ronald Alley and John Rothenstein, eds. *Francis Bacon* (New York: The Viking, 1964); and David Sylvester, *Francis Bacon: The Human Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Hugh M. Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953* (New York: Distributed Art, 2001), 11.

and wrestlers over the span of his career. His early artistic work, likely influenced by his mentor, the Australian painter Roy de Maistre, referenced tropes such as crucifixion scenes and figures in landscapes.<sup>5</sup> Self-portraits and portraits of friends pervade his middle and late periods. Bacon's papal variations are most dominant in his early and middle career, however, unlike most of his themes, he sporadically revisited the Popes well into his later period.

Between 1946 and 1971, a time marked as the height of his artistic production, Bacon painted some of his most acclaimed and perplexing work by repeating the subject matter of popes, specifically noting Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* (Figure 2).<sup>6</sup> Bacon confessed, in his famous 1963 interview with friend and art historian David Sylvester, referencing Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, "I've always thought it was one of the greatest paintings in the world and I've had a crush on it."<sup>7</sup> Bacon's infatuation with the portrait in conjunction with his search for a new kind of figural depiction caused him to generate a timely series of papal portraits that shocked viewers into questioning the reality of the world around them. Bacon hoped to uncover the "truth" in reality by "tearing down the veils."<sup>8</sup> Bacon commented, "Great art is always a way of concentrating, reinventing what is called fact, what we know of our existence— a reconcentration, tearing away the veils that fact acquires through time. Ideas always acquire appearance veils, the attitudes

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Harrison, *In Camera: Francis Bacon Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 28-31. Harrison argues that de Maistre might have influenced Bacon in his construction of his crucifixion paintings during the early 1930s.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>7</sup> Wieland Schmied, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1996), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh M. Davies and Sally Yard, *Francis Bacon* (New York: Abbeville, 1986), 110.



people acquire of their time and earlier time. Really good artists tear down those veils.”<sup>9</sup> Since Bacon’s series of papal portraits were based on a painting created three hundred years earlier, Velázquez’ *Pope Innocent X* would have undoubtedly acquired “veils” in Bacon’s mind. A contemporary audience viewing Velazquez’ *Pope Innocent X* would, according to Bacon’s claims, grapple with elusive visual cues distinguishing the “facts” from “appearance veils.” Over time, the commission of the painting, Pope’s life and activity, and program of the seventeenth-century papacy, among other “facts,” would have changed just as visual reception evolves with context and expectation. Therefore, Bacon’s papal variations should be understood as his attempt to problematize the public’s perception of “truth” through images portraying the institution of the papacy.

#### Post-War Europe and the Papal Variations

Initially exhibited and created in the context of post-World War II England, Bacon’s portrayal of isolated, suffering popes posed pertinent questions regarding the line between good and evil, the role of religion in contemporary life, and the authority of traditional institutions. Davies wrote of Bacon’s papal portraits and their relationship to religion and Post-War Europe: “The eternal quiet of Velázquez’s Innocent is replaced by the involuntary cry of Bacon’s anonymous, unwitting, tortured occupant of the hot seat. One could hardly conceive of a more devastating depiction of postwar, existential angst or a more convincing denial of faith in the era that exemplified Nietzsche’s declaration that God is dead.”<sup>10</sup> Bacon’s decision to depict a historical and religious authority in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*, 12.

environment of post-war Britain reflects his critical intentions. By inverting the figure's attributes to its binary opposites (attributes of strength become weakness), Bacon uses the context of fear and recovery after World War II to question "truth," especially institutional authority. The visual interaction between the Pope and the audience is deliberately uncomfortable. For those viewing Bacon's papal paintings, the emotional discomfort caused by the artist's fragmentation of the Pope's body and expression on the decaying figure lead to a questioning of the authority, stability, and validity of the Pope and Catholic Church.

Questions regarding the identity and position of the Pope relate to Bacon's referencing of his papal subject as a "tragic hero" (a term most likely due to his interest in literature).<sup>11</sup> His papal portraits exemplify the "tragic hero" through the visual combination of attributes connoting weakness and spiritual gifts (such as the scream and papal vestments), shown in the portrayal of the sacrifice of the Pope. The term connotes and joins the symbolic authority of the long-standing icon of the Pope with Bacon's painfully disabling portrayal of the human body. Aristotle, whose discussion of the tragedy continues to inform literary theory, claimed of the "tragic hero," "There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment."<sup>12</sup> Aristotle's statement refers to the subject's normal position in society. For him, a successful "tragic hero" is not morally virtuous or reprehensible. The

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<sup>11</sup> Alley and Rothenstein, *Francis Bacon*, 68.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), 9.

significance in Bacon's use of the term relies on the judgment passed on the "tragic hero" by society. When seen as neither morally superior or inferior, the Pope becomes just a human being, a person susceptible to pain and no closer to God than anyone else. Bacon's papal variations present his audience with a different depiction of the Pope than the traditional propagandistic "official" portrait program controlled and commissioned by the Papacy; Bacon's Pope has no actual power or spiritual authority.<sup>13</sup> Much like his friend Alberto Giacometti's *Walking Man II* (1960) (Figure 6), Bacon's lone Pope simultaneously evokes virtuous, humbling, and disturbing reactions.

Interestingly, Giacometti copied Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* in a sketch during 1936 (Figure 7). In contrast to Bacon's project, Giacometti paid attention to the "original" painting and attempted to replicate Velázquez' naturalism. He concentrated on the face and the psychology of man, evidenced by the stern look and multiple lines that indicate depth and perspective on the head of the Pope.<sup>14</sup> Bacon's papal variations differ from Giacometti's because they do not replicate a naturalistic figurative depiction prioritizing mimesis. Distinctions in their divergent approaches to Velázquez' portrait are important, given the art-historical canon's grouping of both artists as Post-War expressionists (a classification that Bacon personally disapproved of, in regards to his artistic identity).<sup>15</sup> Bacon and Giacometti's engagement with Velázquez' portrait

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<sup>13</sup> More information on the relationship between Bacon and the genre of "official" seated papal portraits will be provided in Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation* (London: Phaidon, 1993), 70-71. In this text, Bacon claimed that Giacometti was "not only among the greatest draughtsman of our time but among the greatest of all time."

<sup>15</sup> Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*.

prioritize and appropriate different visual elements and thereby, point to Bacon's interaction with the painting as conceptually guided rather than mimetically inspired.

While many of Bacon's paintings use the word "sketch" or "study" in their title, such as *Study for the Head of a Screaming Pope* (1952) (Figure 8), *Study for a Pope* (1955) (Figure 9), and *Study (Imaginary Portrait of Pope Pius XII)* (1955) (Figure 10), their visual nature ties more closely to a completed work.<sup>16</sup> The artist's papal variations function as sketches because they were part of a continuing series that never fully satisfied his personal goals. Bacon despairingly claimed that the variations were "a failure."<sup>17</sup> His devaluing of the series emphasizes the variations' role as an interest that he returned to in the hope of achieving a particular vision. Despite the papal portraits' similar appearance to unfinished work evidenced by their sparse backgrounds and light white perspectival lines, Bacon's paintings of popes employ techniques that allude to sketches to improve their efficacy. The lack of detail in the background and warped perspective bolster the pope as the visual focal point. All the popes in Bacon's series can be linked by the high level of attention given to their faces in comparison to the rest of the canvas.

Significantly, Bacon's papal variations are based off of photographic reproductions of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*. Bacon stated in regards to this practice, "I

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<sup>16</sup> David Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 189. Sylvester comments in his sixth bullet point on conventions in Bacon's painting "So there are studies from, studies for, studies of, studies after, as if to say that at least some of the works were preliminary sketches for more definitive statements. What is in fact being said is that the artist wishes all his works to be regarded as provisional."

<sup>17</sup> David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 71.

became obsessed by this painting and I bought photograph after photograph of it.”<sup>18</sup> His words assert his primary fixation with the photographs of the work over the “original” painting. Numerous leaves bare the physical wear and tear of 7 Reece Mews and Bacon’s consultation. Books, torn-out pages, and photographs formed new compositions by being painted over, accidentally splattered on, and written on. Significantly, the artist further restricted his interaction by opting against seeing the “original” painting during the years of producing the papal works. Bacon’s deliberate decision to avoid the portrait firsthand made him reluctant to even enter the Galleria Doria Pamphili in Rome, where the painting and a copy of it hangs.<sup>19</sup>

Bacon’s statements, avoidance behavior, and repetitious activity beg the following questions. What purpose did Bacon’s collection of multiple images of Velázquez’ *Pope Innocent X* serve? What was he trying to achieve? How are the papal variations similar and different from one another? And, finally, why did he ultimately consider them to be a “failure”? This chapter works to answer these questions through contextualizing the creation of the papal portraits, performing a formal visual analysis of key papal works, creating a typology of the kinds of papal variations, and exploring the meaning of the portraits’ iconography.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bacon was in Rome in 1954 and did not visit the Galleria Doria Pamphili. However, in 1991, a year before his death, Bacon did encounter the Velazquez portrait firsthand. Curiously, there is little information on his reaction to the portrait or any statements as to why he chose to finally see it. It is important to note that by 1991 he had stopped making papal portraits for twenty years. The family name Pamphili can also be spelled Pamphilj.

### Overview of Papal Variations

This nearly obsessive series resulted in forty-four oil paintings, in addition to an unknown number of destroyed works, works on paper, and preparatory pieces. The series includes many of Bacon's well-known paintings such as *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) (Figure 3) and *Figure with Meat* (1954) (Figure 11). Harrison contends that the artist began his papal depictions in 1946 while vacationing in Monte Carlo. Displeased with these works, Bacon subsequently destroyed them.<sup>20</sup> Due to the artist's obliteration of the paintings and the works' lack of public viewing, little can be discerned concerning the first group of papal variations. The earliest surviving papal variation, *Head VI* (Figure 12) dates to 1949.<sup>21</sup> Bacon's last extant papal portrait, *Study of Red Pope, 1962* (Figure 13), was completed in 1971. While Bacon's painting was often serial and appropriated from other artists' work, such as Vincent van Gogh's *The Painter on the Road to Tarascon* (1888), no subject can compete with his engagement with the Velázquez portrait.<sup>22</sup> Schmied wrote of Bacon's appropriation in comparison with other artists in the art- historical canon: "Bacon's fascination with Velázquez's portrait of Innocent X must surely be without parallel in the history of art; as an instance of obsession with a specific picture by another major artist, it surpasses even van Gogh's preoccupation with Delacroix or Picasso's variations on Grunewald."<sup>23</sup> Read as such,

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<sup>20</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> *Head VI* implies at least five other works within the series. The group included a range of figurative motifs, but, only *Head VI* referenced Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*.

<sup>22</sup> Brendan Prendeville, "Varying the Self: Bacon's Versions of van Gogh," *Oxford Art Journal* 27 (2004): 23-42.

<sup>23</sup> Schmied, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict*, 17.

Bacon's papal variations occupy a unique position in the history of art and engage issues particular to appropriation.

### Typology of Papal Variations

Outlining a typology of Bacon's papal portraits is important due to the lack of clarity in the classification and organization of Bacon's oeuvre. Rothenstein and Alley's 1964 catalogue raisonné unfortunately is now outdated and incomplete (Bacon produced art until his death in 1992).<sup>24</sup> Bacon's destruction of his work, in addition to newly-found preparatory sketches and works on paper, create further challenges to interpreting his art in a cohesive thematic manner.<sup>25</sup> As a public figure that self-fashioned his public persona as a bohemian, he denied any significance in traditional sketch work. He claimed that at times he sketched but that the final image presented itself to him on the canvas as if by luck or chance.<sup>26</sup> However, Bacon did create loose sketches, collect and contain disparate

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<sup>24</sup> Alley and Rothenstein, *Francis Bacon*. The Estate of Francis Bacon website provides up-to-date information regarding the research and publishing of the catalogue raisonné. For more information, consult <http://www.francis-bacon.com/news/?c=Catalogue-Raisonne>.

<sup>25</sup> Some of these works on paper have been controversial in their attribution to Bacon. One of the artist's neighbors Barry Joule presented a collection of works on paper to the Tate Museum. The museum refused to accept the gift claiming that they were uncertain if they were authentically Bacon. After the artist's death in 1992 many have come forward with materials from his studio, and even garbage in hopes of profiting financially from his fame. The Irish Museum of Modern Art held an exhibition of the works, now known as the "X Album." Two publications came from the "X Album" findings: David Alan Mellor, Barry Joule, Richard Hamilton, and Declan McGonagle, *The Barry Joule Archive: Works on Paper Attributed to Francis Bacon* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2000); and Mark Sladen and John Hoole, *Bacon's Eye: Works on Paper Attributed to Francis Bacon from the Barry Joule Archive*, ed. Georgia Mazower (London: 21 Publishing, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 16-17. Bacon claimed in interviews that he wanted to allow accidents to happen to his paintings. In her essay, "Chance and the Tradition of Art in Francis Bacon's Work" Barbara Steffen examines Bacon's early ties to Surrealism. Surrealist interaction with chance and employment of the self-conscious could have contributed to Bacon's consistent statements that uphold accident, chance, and chaos as contributing factors to his paintings. Steffen articulates the element of chance in Bacon's work through a thematic discussion of the white blotch. In many of his works, including some of his papal portraits, Bacon placed a white blotch of paint on the canvas. The blotch of paint appears to be situated due

images, and destroy work that he felt seemed too contrived. It seems as if Bacon was more concerned with constructing a façade that appeared to be based on chance operations than fully allowing randomness to function fully. However, the role of chance cannot be completely discarded. It connected him to a tradition of artists who reinvented modes of representation and provided for unlikely juxtapositions and undoubtedly caused some alterations to his final painting. In a related activity, Bacon's paintings rely on controlled chaos.<sup>27</sup> He supplied the container (7 Reece Mews) in which juxtapositions of many kinds of visual material such as film stills, surgical studies, personal photographs, and reproductions of famous paintings took place. His construction of controlled chance in the site of his small studio led to the repetition of iconographic markers in his oeuvre. Thus, the papal variations hold many visual connections to his other paintings. Bacon worked on the papal portraits over a twenty-five year time span. Such a long engagement likely caused Bacon to change his expectations and interaction with Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*. He even reflected that his disappointment in the papal series was in hindsight, which suggests that he had different intentions regarding the whole series at

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to chance—normally in distracting locations such as on the face. Bacon attributed the blotch to purely chance. He saw tossing a blob of paint onto the canvas as a way of letting accident play a significant role in the completed work. However, scholars such as Sylvester have pointed out the 'conscious manipulation' of Bacon's process. The use of controlled chance recalls the work of American Abstract Expressionist action painter Jackson Pollock, whose drip paintings seemingly use chance but in a controlled and deliberate manner. Barbara Steffen, "Chance and the Tradition of Art in Francis Bacon's Work," in *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, eds. Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Steffen and Christoph Vitali (Milan: Skira, 2003), 23-42.

<sup>27</sup> For Bacon, controlled chaos relies on accident or chance of images colliding with one another within the confined space of 7 Reece Mews. The artist often referenced the role of chance or accident in his work. Use of chance in artistic process has a long tradition to collage works such as Kurt Schwitters' Merz works and Surrealist games, like the exquisite corpse, and artworks.



the end of his life distinct from those of the individual paintings at the time they were created.<sup>28</sup>

All of Bacon's papal works reference Velázquez' Baroque portrait in terms of iconography, positioning, and psychological impact on the viewer. Velázquez depicted Pope Innocent X at a three-quarter view, sternly and cynically addressing the audience. He sits powerfully in his gilded papal throne wearing crimson and white vestments. Both of his arms rest on the chair, prominently displaying his papal rings and a paper document with text attributing the painting to Velázquez.<sup>29</sup> Large ears, a sharp nose, and a furrowed brow supply individualized facial features that reinforce notions of a "true" mimetic portrait. Velázquez' portrayal fits with Anton Haidacher's account, who described Pope Innocent X's physical appearance as awkward and unappealing. According to Anton Haidacher's findings, Pope Innocent X was "tall, gaunt stature, with small eyes, large feet and sparse beard, his skin colour almost olive green, his head bare."<sup>30</sup>

#### Iconographic Links to Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*: Furniture, Vestments and Jewelry

Iconographically consistent with Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, all of Bacon's popes, with the exception of the flying figure in *Study for a Pope*, 1955 (Figure 14), sit in a papal

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<sup>28</sup> Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 71.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Steffen, "The Papal Portraits," in *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, eds. Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Steffen and Christoph Vitali (Milan: Skira, 2003), 116. The inscription on the document reads, "Alla Santa di Nr Sigre/Innocencio X./Per/Diego de Silva/Velazquez dela Ca/mera di s. Mte Cattca. 1650." José Lopez-Ray, *Velázquez, Werkverzeichnis* (Cologne, 1999), 282.

<sup>30</sup> Anton Haidacher, *Geschichte der Päpste in Bildern* (Heidelberg: F.H. Kerle Verlag, 1965), 596.

throne (*ex cathedra*).<sup>31</sup> Davies' use of the term *ex cathedra* in his accompanying text for an exhibition on the 1953 papal portraits speaks specifically to the symbolic power and authority tied to the throne. *Ex cathedra* can be interpreted literally and figuratively as a piece of furniture as well as the position of God's seated mortal representative on Earth. Barbara Steffen pushed the link further and connected the 1953 series to the *sedes gestatoria* or portable papal seat.<sup>32</sup> Steffen's usage stresses Bacon's appropriation of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*. Just as Bacon has removed the Baroque portrait and leader from its initial context, the papal throne and authority therein has been effectively appropriated through the portable nature of the *sedes gestatoria*. The papal seat designates the power and authority of the Pope. Agostino Paravicini-Bagliani emphasizes the significance of papal chairs as legitimizers of patriarchal and religious authority of a newly appointed pope.<sup>33</sup> Language used to describe, empower, and organize the Catholic Church utilizes the powerful symbolism of the throne. For example, the Holy See literally refers to the bishop's seat. This seat connotes the role of the papacy as "presiding over, and teaching the Christian community."<sup>34</sup> Paravicini-Bagliani analyzes the functional and symbolic differences and similarities between the two types of papal thrones: the *sedes stercorata* (stone seat) and the *porphirecticae* (porphyry seat).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*, 11. As Davies explained the meaning of *ex cathedra* has a dual meaning. Literally translated into the cathedral seat it can be read as a piece of furniture as well as the position of God's seated representative on mortal Earth.

<sup>32</sup> Steffen, "The Papal Portraits," 115. Popes were lifted high in crowds on the *sedes gestatoria*. The portable and light nature of the chair made it possible to be seen by more people.

<sup>33</sup> Agostino Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope's Body* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) 44-45.

<sup>34</sup> *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1181.

<sup>35</sup> Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope's Body*, 44-45. According to Paravicini-Bagliani, the stone throne's symbolic significance is sustained through official books on papal ceremonial decorum and a passage from

Bacon's popes sit on two kinds of chairs that parallel Paravicini-Bagliani's designations: an ornate gilded chair with finials or a square chair with a lack of decorative details.

Bacon's use of the gilded carved papal seat in works such as *Portrait of a Cardinal I (Pope I)*, (1955) (Figure 15) recalls the form of the *sedes stercorata*. In the painting, Bacon relies on the audience understanding the throne as papal. The two large glistening finials signal the prestige of the Papacy and flank the seated figure, who appears as more of a businessman than a pope due to his contemporary clothing.<sup>36</sup>

Paravicini-Bagliani wrote, "The significance of this symbol of humility, perhaps the most radical symbol ever applied to the Roman pontiff (by means of the connection between the seat and the word *stercus*, meaning dung, mud, filth, and even excrement), is obvious. Having reached the summit of grandeur and wealth, the pope was obliged to recall his basic human condition and to humble himself."<sup>37</sup> Visually, *sedes stercorata* recalled imperial thrones through their ornate carvings and motifs that stressed religion's elevated character, defeating evil through the power and mercy of God.<sup>38</sup> Bacon's 1960 variation *Seated Figure (Red Cardinal)* (Figure 16) uses the *porphirecticae* as a supportive stilt. The thick purple, simplified slabs add stability and weight that visually ground the blurred human form. Bacon's use of the minimal throne form signaled the Pope's vested authority due to the richness of porphyry, while compositionally securing the audience's focus on the central figure.

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1 Samuel 2:8. The biblical passage articulates the strength and intent of God. It reads that God, "raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, and inherit a seat of honor."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Each of Bacon's human subjects can be additionally identified as a pope through his vestments. The papal cap with three ridges (officially called a *carnauro*) provides a consistent link for the majority of Bacon's popes. The *carnauro* functions as an article of clothing that physically protects the Pope's head from the cold, but also signifies the superior intellect of the Pope and marks his position as the "head" of the Catholic Church. Bacon's early papal portrait *Pope I* (1951) (Figure 17) emphasizes the cap by elongating the violet *carnauro*. Distorting the proportions of the papal cap caricature Pope Innocent X's long face and recall the formal three-tier papal tiara (a vestment not depicted by Bacon but emblematic of the grandeur of the papacy). Rather than alluding to articles of papal costume like the tiara, Bacon's papal portraits directly follow Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* by wearing a crimson red outer short cape garment, or *mozzetta*. Bacon, however, varies the color of the cape, employing violet and blue in addition to red. In Catholicism, the deep red in *Study for Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1965) (Figure 18) can symbolically recall the Passion of Christ. The deep color purple, such as in *Figure Seated (The Cardinal)* (1955) (Figure 19) references imperial power, whereas blue tends to refer to the Virgin Mary. In Velázquez' portrait, white undergarments emphasize the innocence, humility, and purity of Christ's death on the cross, especially in contrast to the brightly colored, rich, and typically red *mozzetta*. Bacon's papal variations continue to use the contrast of white undergarment and colored *mozzetta*. In so doing, the artist connects his work iconographically with the tradition of seated papal portraits.

Keeping with traditional papal portrait iconography, Velázquez' portrait depicts Pope Innocent X wearing a topaz ring on his right hand.<sup>39</sup> The topaz ring is a long-

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<sup>39</sup> Steffen, "The Papal Portraits," 116.

standing symbol of papal authority. For instance, Titian's *Pope Paul Farnese* (after 1546) (Figure 20) wears a similar square topaz ring. Sebastiano del Piombo's studio's painting of Pope Clement VII (1531/32) (Figure 21) placed three large rings on the Pope, two of which are topaz. Rings symbolized the marriage and unity between the Pope and the Church as well as the intimate relationship between Pope and Christ.<sup>40</sup> Additionally the scale and opulence of the ring spoke to the wealth and authority of the papal state. Bacon's inclusion of the ring, like the rich furniture and clothing, ironically plays with the audience's expected perception of the power and wealth of the Papacy. While decadence and prestige are symbolically present in the ring, the characteristics of the Pope and the stark environment dispute this contention. The Pope appears weak and the background provides no details of place, let alone grandeur.

#### Bacon's Sub-Series of Popes and Interest in Sequencing

While the papal variations can be regarded as a unified series, their production occurred at different times in Bacon's career that also allows them to be read independently or in sub-series. For example, some of the paintings maintain stylistic unity, were completed over a short period of time, and were created for a particular exhibition or showing. However, an equal number function as independent works within a time of artistic production predominately dedicated to a different subject, such as Bacon's triptych works, wrestlers, animals, self-portraits or portraits of friends. Due to these differences in

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<sup>40</sup> *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism.*

time and means of conception and construction, each group needs to be properly contextualized and formally analyzed.

The earliest surviving Bacon papal variation is *Head VI* (1949) (Figure 12).

Lawrence Gowing wrote of the contemporary response to the work:

The shock of the picture, when it was seen with a whole series of heads in Bacon's exhibition at the Hanover Gallery in London at Christmas 1949, was indescribable. ... It was everything unpardonable. The paradoxical appearance at once of pastiche and iconoclasm was indeed one of Bacon's most original strokes. The picture remains as one of his masterpieces and one of the least conventional, least foreseeable pictures of the twentieth century.<sup>41</sup>

*Head IV* encloses the purple Pope in a box and focuses on the bust and face of the Pope that disappears and dissolves like steam on the canvas. Despite the innovation of the papal portraits, displayed in *Head IV*, Bacon found himself discontent with his early papal works, so much so that after their showing he destroyed the initial three paintings created for the Hanover Gallery in London.<sup>42</sup> Bacon also destroyed his *Untitled (Study After Velázquez II)* from 1950. However, recently *Study after Velázquez* (1950) (Figure 22) and *Study after Velázquez II* (1950) (Figure 23) surfaced.<sup>43</sup> These two paintings stand apart from other papal variations for their use of veils, or what Bacon coined “shuttering.”<sup>44</sup> The Pope sits in a centrally located throne, like the majority of those in the larger series however, the clarity of the figure is further blurred with the inclusion of repeating vertical striations that rain down upon the sitter.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Gowing and Sam Hunter. *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Steffen, “The Papal Portraits,” 118.

<sup>43</sup> Davies, *Francis Bacon*, 16-17. Davies discusses the possible reasons why these works remained hidden.

<sup>44</sup> Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*.

In the fall of 1951, Bacon began a third series of popes based on a photograph capturing Pope Pius XII seated during a public ceremony.<sup>45</sup> The small group included *Pope I* (Figure 17), *Pope II (Pope Shouting)* (Figure 24), and *Pope III (Pope with Fan Canopy)* (Figure 25). Interestingly, *Pope II (Pope Shouting)* was the first work finished in the small group. *Pope II (Pope Shouting)* was followed by *Pope I* and then *Pope III (Pope with Fan Canopy)*.<sup>46</sup> The numbering and attention given to the titles outside of their actual chronological completion supports a sequential reading. *Pope I*, *Pope II (Pope Shouting)* and *Pope III (Pope with Fan Canopy)* sit in a chair atop a raised platform. An elliptical line intersects the foundation on which the Pope's throne rests, spatially suggesting the curved form of the apse of a church.<sup>47</sup> Positioned asymmetrically, the Pope remains on the right side of the canvas in all three paintings indicating the consistency of the location, figure, and time. Read sequentially according to their titles, the Pope, at first, leers at the audience, screams out toward them, and ends the interaction by violently writhing in pain with eyes cast away. The paintings break the viewer's interaction with the Pope into momentary fragments. *Pope III (Pope with Fan Canopy)*, now destroyed, is the only one of Bacon's papal variations to include a canopy. The canopy does, however, encroach upon the figure in a similar way as Bacon's umbrellas. Like the umbrellas, the canopy marks a sacred location, focuses the viewer's attention on the Pope, and hides the Pope from direct interaction with the viewer.

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<sup>45</sup> Steffen, "The Papal Portraits," 118.

<sup>46</sup> Alley and Rothenstein, *Francis Bacon*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> Steffen, "The Papal Portraits," 119. Steffen claims that the ellipse lines reference the papal apartment.

In 1999, the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego organized “Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953.” The exhibition brought together a series of eight papal portraits: *Study for Portrait I-VIII* (Figure 26-33).<sup>48</sup> During the summer of 1953 over a two-week span, Bacon quickly painted the works for an upcoming autumn exhibition in New York at the Durlacher Brothers Gallery.<sup>49</sup> Surprisingly, the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego’s exhibition marks the first time all of the paintings had been exhibited together. The Durlacher Brothers’ show only featured five of the variations; *Study for Portrait II* (Figure 27), *Study for Portrait IV* (Figure 29), and *Study for Portrait VI* (Figure 31) were excluded.<sup>50</sup> Davies claims that the initial painting *Study for Portrait I* (Figure 26) began as a portrait of David Sylvester. Much like the work of Bacon’s artistic peer and friend Giacometti, the portrait changed as the sittings continued.<sup>51</sup> By Sylvester’s fourth sitting, the portrait meshed with Velázquez’s *Pope Innocent X*.<sup>52</sup> While the figure sits cloaked in papal vestments and the sharp elongated face mimic the features of Pope Innocent X, Sylvester’s deep-set eyes make direct contact with the viewer. Bacon’s involuntary behavior attests to his deep-seeded interest in *Pope Innocent X* and the role of spontaneity in the artist’s process.

Each of the portraits is almost identical in size and set in a dark vacant background loosely demarcated by lightly sketched yellow and white lines. Long lines of

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<sup>48</sup> Davies, *Francis Bacon*, 14. The 1953 grouping is the largest deliberately cohesive series in Bacon’s career.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* The show was Bacon’s first exhibition outside of England.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> James Lord, *A Giacometti Portrait* (London: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1980).

<sup>52</sup> Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*, 14.



gold allude to the papal throne and finials. Their consistency in vacant background, furniture, and fixtures works to unify the series and creates a sequencing effect much like his earlier series. Photographic materials, such as Eadweard Muybridge's book *The Human Figure in Motion*, found in his studio corroborate Bacon's fascination in sequencing or breaking down one event into distinct parts. Muybridge's motion studies (Figure 34) break each movement into a separate visual sequence represented by a single photograph. Books of film stills, photo booth photographs and print contact sheets, all items found in 7 Reece Mews, operate similarly. According to Davies, Bacon purposely painted *Study for Portrait I-VIII* as a series, deliberately linking the images to create "shifting sequences."<sup>53</sup> To support a sort of narrative involving the same Pope in a range of moods and activity, all of the paintings place the figure at approximately the same height on the canvas and use the same proportional scale. Consistency in the size of the popes continues throughout his career. Each variation, except for *Study for Portrait I* (Figure 26), incorporates a gold tassel dangling awkwardly around the Pope. The tassel continues to appear in Bacon's variations and relates to traditional seated papal portraits that depict a curtain in the background. The curtain references the interior of the papal chambers, creates the feeling of a privileged interaction between the papal sitter and the artist, and reinforces the Pope's official capacity. In the same year of the series' production, Sam Hunter wrote, "Technically, Bacon has been audacious enough to try for one continuous cinematic impression in his popes—an entirely new kind of painting experience. He combines the monumentality of the great art of the past with the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid,15.

'modernity' of the film strip."<sup>54</sup> Use of the curtain in Bacon's papal variations combines elements of performance found in the cinema and the propagandistic "performance" of the Papacy. Playfully intermingling the two, Bacon critiques the official nature of the Pope, the Papacy, and the Roman Catholic Church by merging the modern context of film with a potentially outdated religious system.

The first portrait in the series, *Study for Portrait I* parallels Velázquez' *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* and the tradition of official seated papal portraits most closely. Bacon's pope sits at a three-quarter view directly glaring at the viewer. Cloaked in violet vestments and wearing wire-rim glasses, the pope dissolves into the non-descript black background and the unprimed marigold expanse spanning the bottom third of the canvas. His blurred pale white face and missing extremities further support the physical dissolution of the figure.

*Study for Portrait II* (Figure 27) presents the pope in profile. Bacon's employment of the profile view foreshadows the 1964 working photographic documents made by John Deakin of George Dyer in Soho (Figure 35) that led to works such as *Study for Head of George Dyer* (1967) (Figure 36).<sup>55</sup> The figure's bright white collar of his undergarments and the stark black background causes the head to encroach on the picture plane. Movement is implied through the now asymmetrical distribution of the head and the finials. Purple vestments continue to hide the unformed body. Hands, arms, and legs are not visibly present. Space and perspective are complicated by the illogical rendering of sketchy white lines and tubular gold strokes. Unlike the first portrait in the series, *Study*

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<sup>54</sup> Sam Hunter, "Francis Bacon: An Acute Sense of Impasse," *Art Digest* 28 (October 15, 1953), 16.

<sup>55</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*, 182-183.

*for Portrait II* turns away from the viewer with his eyes closed in a dismissive manner. Davies claims, of the next painting in the sequence, that the figure in *Study for Portrait III* (Figure 28) “appears guarded in confronting the painter.”<sup>56</sup> The blurring of the face makes it difficult to read the mood of the figure. The closed mouth and eyeglasses convey a feeling of timidity recalling Davies’ assertion. The lack of movement, scream, and facial drama present a more formal, static, and quiet pope.

*Study for Portrait IV* (Figure 29) depicts more of the gold tubular constructs than the other works in the 1953 series. A large gold, rectangular outline extends above the figure on the throne. The shape and positioning recall the gilded frames surrounding Bacon’s papal works. Bacon wanted each of his works to be mounted under thick glass and with traditional gilded frames.<sup>57</sup> The pope is situated within the picture plane, and then reframed in the second gold rectangular construction. The right hand of the pope touches his nose and face possibly alluding to an involuntary action such as a sneeze. The blurred rendering of the face extends to the hand that ghostly and ethereally floats beneath the papal garb. *Study for Portrait IV* is the only painting in the 1953 series that depicts legs. Light, straggly lines curve and extend below the right hipline of the pope.

The fifth portrait is the only one in the Durlacher Brothers’ series with an additional parenthetical designation. *Study for Portrait V (Cardinal V)* (Figure 30)

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<sup>56</sup> Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 19. Bacon’s use of rich gilded frames link him to earlier art and artists. It also forced viewers to confront their own reflection in the glass. The opulence of the gold frames also recalls Bacon’s outdated states that mimicked the heavy, decadent Aristocratic furnishings of his youth.

creepily smiles out at the viewer.<sup>58</sup> His eyes are fully blurred adding to the audience's feeling of discomfort. Drapery is implied through sloping lavender lines intersecting at the Pope's midsection. A polygonal shape formed by the gold lines contains the figure on the canvas. This polygonal form shifts slightly in *Study for Portrait VI* (Figure 31). This minor alteration in composition again references the sequential nature of the series and the portrayal of fragmented movement of the same pope throughout time. The Pope's eyes roll backward as he sits motionless. Davies interprets this pope as attempting to speak.<sup>59</sup> Dark patches on the cloak give this pope more depth than the earlier paintings in the 1953 series.

*Study for Portrait VII* (Figure 32) portrays the Pope fully screaming. His shoulders lift up as if caught by surprise. Dotted lines streak off the edge of his left shoulder giving a feeling of hastened movement. The polygonal form overlaps the papal figure negating the depth and weight established in the previous portrait. The culminating portrait in the series *Study for Portrait VIII* (Figure 33) most fully breaks from Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*. The Pope raises his arms defiantly at the viewer, signaling disgust.

#### Bacon's Iconographic Markers: Raw Meat, Owls and Monkeys, and the Scream

In addition to the 1949, 1951, and 1953 series, many of the papal variations can be categorized according to three iconographic markers: raw meat, animals (owls and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 15. Davies relates the Pope's teeth to a photograph of Teddy Roosevelt laughing. While visually the images can be linked, Davies does not provide any information on the origin of the Roosevelt image and if it was found in 7 Reece Mews.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

monkeys), and the scream. Two papal variations, *Figure with Meat*, (1954) (Figure 11) and *Pope II*, (1960) (Figure 37), juxtapose the Pope with raw meat. The use of meat in figurative painting often serves a moralizing function. Seeing depictions of meat causes viewers to question their own identity, short lifespan, and hierarchical position in the food chain. While humans commonly identify themselves as superior to animals, both animals and humans are, at their foundation, simply meat.<sup>60</sup> The clear lines between animal and human, savage and civilized blur. Gilles Deleuze writes of Bacon's use of meat imagery: "Meat is not dead flesh; it retains all the sufferings and assumes all the colors of living flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful innovation, color, and acrobatics. Bacon does not say, "Pity the beasts," but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat."<sup>61</sup> Bacon's papal variations rely on this interrelation between raw meat and the suffering of humanity. The physical pain of the Popes asserts their primary role as meat over that of religious authority. The artist emphasized this connection in an interview with Sylvester. Bacon said: "I've always been very moved by pictures of slaughterhouses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion...Of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher shop I always think it's surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal."<sup>62</sup> Bacon's interest in raw meat began at an early age. In the 1920s, he convinced a childhood friend to go with him to examine hanging meat cuts at local butcher shops in

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<sup>60</sup> Nick Fiddes. *Meat: A Natural Symbol* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 21.

<sup>62</sup> Sylvester. *The Brutality of Fact*, 23, 46.

Sallins, County Kildare, Ireland.<sup>63</sup> Many different kinds of photographs of meat were found in Bacon's studio at 7 Reece Mews. In addition to photographs, Bacon collected reproductions of works of art that depicted raw meat, such as Chaim Soutine's *Carcass of Beef* (1925) (Figure 38) as well as hand-drawn illustrations of cuts of meat (Figure 39). Bacon's use of animals, such as owls and primates, functions in the same regard as his inclusion of meat. The animalistic nature of mankind is asserted. In *Pope and Chimpanzee* (1962) (Figure 40) the monkey climbs atop the seated Pope. Almost attacking the religious authority, the monkey obscures a clear visual reading of the cleric. Movement of the animal, alluded to by bright messy paint, blurs the face and body of the Pope. The audience reads the power of the primate rather than the authority of the Pope and Papacy. The decision to depict a primate alongside the Pope also comments on issues of evolution and religion.

The most reoccurring iconographic element in Bacon's papal portraits is the figure's expressive scream. Bacon claims that the visual depiction of the scream was appropriated from Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film *The Battleship Potemkin*. According to Harrison, Bacon could have seen the film while working as an interior designer, possibly at its debut showing in London in November of 1929.<sup>64</sup> During the film's climax on the Odessa steps, a nurse gets shot directly in her right eye while descending the stairs. Imagery of the scream combines different sensory elements. Bacon's painted canvas, a silent art object, depicts a human expression loaded with auditory readings. The lack of sound and the intensity of the open-mouthed scream create a tension that freezes the

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<sup>63</sup> Doreen Molony, "Unclaimed genius from county Kildare." *The Irish Press*, 28 March 1977: 9.

<sup>64</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*, 26.

interaction. Time stops. The scream shows no sign of ending. The Pope's human outcry, representative of all mankind, is silenced. Film stills of *Battleship Potemkin* and other stills made up a large portion of Bacon's studio image collection (Figure 41). Bacon openly cited his adoration for the medium of film. He said, "Oh, yes, cinema is great art! I've often said to myself that I would have liked to been a film director if I hadn't been a painter."<sup>65</sup>

### Stylistic Shifts in Bacon's Papal Variations

Bacon's work can also be categorized according to stylistic shifts. Davies claims that a stylistic change occurs between Bacon's artwork of the 1940s to the 1950s.<sup>66</sup> He continues by describing Bacon's production in the 1940s as, "closely packed picture surface, color is solid and harsh, and volume is well modeled and clearly stated."<sup>67</sup> He links the instability of surface, form, color, and volume in the 1950s paintings to Bacon's growing interest in photography and its relationship to documenting issues of movement. Bacon's papal portraits stylistically evolved, like his other figurative work, into more fragmented forms. Conventional uniform bodies and space no longer existed by the 1970s. Conceptually fragmentation operates in his artistic process and paintings through his insistent use of mechanical reproductions, his selection of images, his representation of the human form, his handling of paint, his studio environment, and his employment of

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<sup>65</sup> Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation*, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Hugh Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Early and Middle Years, 1928-1958*, PhD dissertation (Princeton University, 1975), 94.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

serial work. Chapter Two presents a larger discussion on the medium of photography and its influence on Bacon's papal portraits.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Bacon's variations stylistically break from their seventeenth-century model. Bacon's style of painting uses textured, transparent layers of oil paint on, mainly, the unprimed side of the canvas. His highly expressive and abstracted figures actively avoid clear visual definition. Situated in a nondescript location and time, often depicted by Bacon as a black void, his lone figures appear to be simultaneously static and moving, victim and aggressor, real and unreal, alive and dead. This maintenance of tension pervades all of Bacon's papal portraits. The artist's impulse to appropriate from reproductions of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* resulted in a celebrated series that combines conflicting concepts and visual traditions that continue to unnerve viewers of the papal variations. Having given an overview to Bacon's papal variations and outlined their iconographic and stylistic similarities and differences, this thesis shifts its analysis to the artist's process and engagement of photography.



## CHAPTER III

### THE PAPAL PORTRAIT IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION: BACON'S ARTISTIC PROCESS IN PAINTING HIS PAPAL VARIATIONS

Photography is a tool for dealing with things everybody knows about but isn't attending to. My photographs are intended to represent something you don't see.  
-Emmet Gowin<sup>1</sup>

One thing which has never been really worked out is how photography has completely altered figurative painting.  
-Francis Bacon<sup>2</sup>

#### The Importance of Collection and Photographic Material to Bacon's Process

The pastime of collecting material items of significance may be a specifically human activity. Individuals seek treasured goods as a way to support their identity, remember special occasions, or directly interact with the physical world around them. German critical theorist Walter Benjamin (b. 1892-1940) commented on his personal book collection:

Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate that suffuse the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of these books. For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor, 1977), 200.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Harrison, *In Camera: Francis Bacon Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 60.

This welding of oppositional concepts, in particular disorder and order within a collector's nostalgic treasures exemplifies Bacon's artistic activity.

While Bacon collected books, of greater interest, due to its peculiarity, variety, and size, is his collection of visual images.<sup>4</sup> The artist amassed a wide range of process materials or working documents in his infamously chaotic studio and home (Figure 1). The sheer range and number of objects found within the studio makes it nearly impossible to discuss them in full. When the Hugh Lane Municipal Art Gallery in Dublin relocated his small London studio to their exhibition space in August of 1999, their staff catalogued over 7500 photographs, drawings, newspapers clippings, books, and miscellaneous items.<sup>5</sup> Over 1500 of the pieces catalogued were photographic in nature. Thus, it can be implied that these photographic materials hold a central position in regards to Bacon's artistic process.<sup>6</sup> The artist's paintings typically meld disparate physical materials found in his studio to form compositionally unified works and a recognizable figural subject. Functioning as repetitious fragments, Bacon appropriated images from photographic sources and mixed them with those images retrieved from his memory onto the surface of the canvas.

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<sup>4</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery documented over 570 books and 1,300 loose pages. Bacon's interest in these books points to depth of literary and pictorial inspiration. Books offered information, stories, and images that combined in his studio. For additional information on his collection of books please see the Hugh Lane Gallery's website on Francis Bacon's Studio: [http://www.hughlane.ie/francis\\_bacons\\_studio.php?type=About&heading=Books&rsno=3](http://www.hughlane.ie/francis_bacons_studio.php?type=About&heading=Books&rsno=3).

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Steffen, "Chance and the Tradition of Art in Francis Bacon's Work," in *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, eds. Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Steffen and Christoph Vitali (Milan: Skira Editore, 2003), 37.

<sup>6</sup> These images have been called "process materials" by Margarita Cappock, director of the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery in Dublin, Ireland.

Bacon's forty-four papal variations most strongly illustrate his working method of collection, appropriation, and recollection of fragmented photographic materials. To create his series of papal portraits, the artist compiled different photographic reproductions of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* (Figure 2) from various monographs and art-historical texts. The Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery's Francis Bacon Database details the amount and kinds of texts Bacon owned on Velázquez. The artist collected writings by Enrique LaFuente Ferrari, José López-Rey, Jonathan Brown, Xavier de Salas, Georges Belmont, José Ortega y Gasset, and others pertaining to the Spanish court painter.<sup>7</sup> While Bacon's fascination extended to Velázquez' oeuvre and personality (a point analyzed further in Chapter Three), his general interest in the artist can be seen in Bacon's collecting habits. None of the artist's other serial work compares in terms of size, time frame, and personal fixation with his appropriation of Velázquez' seventeenth-century papal portrait.<sup>8</sup> John Russell points out in his biography *Francis Bacon* that, "he [Bacon] was 'influenced' by Velázquez, however, the influence was more subtle than the mere borrowing of a motif."<sup>9</sup> This thesis follows in the footsteps of Russell's statement and examines the intricacies of Bacon's papal variations by analyzing his unique artistic process, its reliance of mechanization, and the resulting consequences of repetition and fragmentation in relationship to issues of originality.

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh Lane Gallery, Francis Bacon Studio Database, consulted in July 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Bacon's appropriation of van Gogh occurs on a much smaller level. The paintings within the Van Gogh series are the only other paintings by Bacon that directly and deliberately appropriate from an artist in the art historical canon. For more information, see Brendan Prendeville, "Varying the Self: Bacon's Versions of van Gogh," *Oxford Art Journal* 27 (2004): 23-42.

<sup>9</sup> John Russell, *Francis Bacon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 46.

Interestingly, much of the artist's working process crystallized during around 1946. While vacationing in Monte Carlo, Bacon started to compile a variety of photographic images, painted on the unprimed side of his canvas, used fabrics such as corduroy for the texturing of paint, and destroyed some of his work, in particular his early works.<sup>10</sup> The artist's strong interest in *Pope Innocent X* continued well into his later period; in 1971, he finished his last papal portrait, *Second Version of 'Study for the Red Pope 1962'* (Figure 42).

#### Bacon's Avoidance of the Velázquez Painting

Significantly, Bacon opted to encounter *Pope Innocent X* only through mechanized reproductions. Despite having the opportunity to see *Pope Innocent X* and other portrayals of the Pope (formerly known as Giovanni Battista Pamphili) firsthand in their initial context at the Galleria Doria Pamphili, Bacon purposely avoided the collection. In 1954, he changed his travel itinerary and ventured to Rome for two months instead of attending the XXVII Biennale in Venice.<sup>11</sup>

Archimbaud claims in his chronology that, while in Rome, Bacon did not visit the Galleria Doria Pamphili due to illness.<sup>12</sup> However, it seems unlikely that Bacon missed

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<sup>10</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*.

<sup>11</sup> Reasons as to why Bacon changed his trip are unknown. He traveled with friends throughout Italy during this time. Regardless of the reason, his lack of commitment to attending the XXVII Biennale supports his identity as a bohemian, and, at the time, an outsider to the international art community.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation* (London: Phaidon, 1993), 177. Bacon supports this with his statements to Archimbaud. However, in Bacon's interviews with David Sylvester, the artist does not mention being ill at all and discusses his avoidance of the work as deliberate. His behavior likely supports Sylvester's findings rather than Archimbaud's claims. Archimbaud's interview was conducted toward the end of the artist's life. It is probable that Bacon hoped to sidestep discussion on his fascination with the Velázquez portrait.

seeing the work firsthand simply on account of sickness. According to Miguel Zugaza, the current Director of the Museo del Prado, Bacon frequently requested the museum to privately open for him on days in which the facilities were closed to the public.<sup>13</sup> The Prado's renowned collection of Velázquez' paintings demanded Bacon's attention to such an extent that he made extra efforts to see the works firsthand. It logically follows that the artist would have visited Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* regardless of illness. His lifestyle allowed for frequent travel, and extending his trip or planning an additional holiday would have been relatively easy. Additionally, Bacon's lifelong struggle with asthma, the most probable cause of his illness, rarely prevented him from leading an adventurous life.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Bacon's fascination and related activity with the Prado's collection of paintings by Velázquez and of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* are noticeably divergent. Thus, seeing Velázquez' art in person and appropriating reproductions of Velázquez' portraits operate differently for Bacon. What did the avoidance of the "original" painting and the use of mechanical reproductions of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* alongside other photographic images offer Bacon?

Some art historians note possible psychological impulses as the origin of Bacon's fascination with *Pope Innocent X*. Wieland Schmied wrote, "He seemed afraid of encountering the original, as if he were insufficiently prepared for the experience of seeing it with his own eyes, or as if he felt unworthy of the privilege. It is also possible that he was afraid of being disappointed; perhaps his mental image of the painting was so powerful that he was unwilling to risk a first-hand encounter which might diminish its

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<sup>13</sup> Agence France Presse, "Bacon exhibition to open at Madrid's Prado," *Yahoo! News*, January 30, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Bacon drank heavily, gambled, kept odd hours, and smoked cigarettes.

stature.”<sup>15</sup> While desire and fear are often interrelated in psychoanalytic texts, Schmieid’s arguments do not fit with Bacon’s actual practice. It is extremely doubtful that the artist found himself “unworthy of the privilege” when he never showed any signs of reluctance to see other paintings by Velázquez in person. Prominent art institutions and scholars regard *Pope Innocent X* as an excellent example of Baroque portraiture. Sir Joshua Reynolds thought that Velázquez’ portrait of the Pope was one of the most impressive paintings ever created.<sup>16</sup> Even so, other paintings by Velázquez, such as *Las Meninas* (1656), are seen as equally, if not more noteworthy. If Bacon felt confident enough to see the Velázquez pieces at the Prado, he would have felt just as confident at the Galleria Doria Pamphili.<sup>17</sup> Curiously, Bacon claimed that *Las Meninas* was his personal favorite of Velázquez’ paintings.<sup>18</sup>

Schmieid’s assertion that Bacon “was unwilling to risk a first-hand encounter which might diminish its stature” is also flawed. The architecture, curation of artworks, and the portrait’s intended reception at the Galleria Doria Pamphili aggrandize the painting and aim to recreate the “original” context surrounding the piece. The Galleria Doria Pamphili places the Velázquez painting at the pinnacle of its collection. Their holdings boast numerous portrayals of the Pope in both paintings and sculptural busts. These artworks, by means of their placement and textual/auditory didactics, anticipate the

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<sup>15</sup> Wieland Schmieid, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1996), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Dawson W. Carr, *Velázquez*, exh. cat. (London: National Gallery, 2006), 221.

<sup>17</sup> After all, it is Velázquez’ work *Las Meninas* that Pablo Picasso appropriated fifty-eight times in 1957, piqued Eve Sussman’s interest to create the 2004 film *89 Seconds at Alcázar* and sparked much art-historical curiosity and debate by such thinkers as Michel Foucault, Leo Steinberg, and Svetlana Alpers.

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*, 89.

Velázquez portrait. Visitors walk down hallways covered in elaborate art and decoration while they listen to one of Giovanni Battista Pamphili's heirs discuss his family's rich collection. Emphasizing issues of originality, the man's voice notes the collection's uniquely unified nature; the family's holdings are the same as they were in the seventeenth century. In 1651, Pope Innocent X specified that the art, furnishings, and other objects of value or aesthetic significance not legally be sold or removed from the premises.<sup>19</sup> The slightly smaller *Copy After Velázquez' Pope Innocent X* (Figure 43) hangs in the precise wall location of the "original" portrait. In so doing, the Galleria Doria Pamphili encourages their contemporary audience to relive the environment of seventeenth-century Rome while simultaneously allowing their curators the freedom to position the "original" portrait in a more privileged location.

Since 1927, Velázquez' portrait of *Pope Innocent X* sits partitioned off in an alcove at the end of the hall. Encircled with red velvet rope and juxtaposed with a sculptural bust of the Pope by the Italian artist and architect Gianlorenzo Bernini, the curation of Velázquez' portrait elevates the painting to the same level of prominence as one of the most esteemed artists of the Baroque period. The plaque didactic, again stressing mimetic likeness, points to anecdotes such as Pope Innocent X's shock at the likeness of Velázquez' portrait and his later ostracization of Bernini and his art from the papal court.<sup>20</sup> According to legend, the Pope exclaimed "*troppo vero*" after seeing

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<sup>19</sup> This information was found through an audio didactic supplied by the Galleria Doria Pamphili.

<sup>20</sup> Information was found on didactic for Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*. The written text was further expanded in the audio accompaniment.

Velázquez' painting for the first time ("it is too true.")<sup>21</sup> By using these stories, the Galleria Doria Pamphili emphasizes the Velázquez portrait as a reflection of mimetic "truth." The traditional aims of portraiture as a visual replication of "likeness" in terms of physical, spiritual, and psychological character bolster Velázquez' success in the eyes of the Galleria Doria Pamphili's audience. The small architectural space encourages long intimate looking and comparison. Additionally, the recent memory of the *Copy After Velázquez' Pope Innocent X* spurs curiosity on issues of originality. Viewers ponder questions such as: how is the copy like the "original"? How is Velázquez' painting more or less successful than Bernini's sculptural bust? What can be deduced about the Pope's artistic preferences, self-fashioning, and leadership? How realistic or true to life is Velázquez' portrayal of Pope Innocent X? Analyzing the environment around the "original" painting and the current installation of the Baroque portrait is crucial to understanding Bacon's avoidance of the space. If seeing the work in person and interacting with the painting through its reproductions are considered to be separate activities that supply different advantages and disadvantages, then the reception of the work by Bacon and the visitors to the Galleria Doria Pamphili should be strikingly distinct. The Galleria Doria Pamphili encourages their audience to uphold their collection and the Velázquez portrait on terms of originality, whereas Bacon's variations and artistic process question the "truth" behind an "original."

Schmied's conclusion that Bacon did not want to "diminish the stature" of the Velázquez portrait, while speculative at best, cannot be supported given the attention to the viewing environment and reception surrounding the painting at the palazzo. The

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<sup>21</sup> Information from didactic at Galleria Doria Pamphili.



“stature” of Velázquez’ *Pope Innocent X* is only further upheld by the practices and priorities of the Galleria Doria Pamphili. Pragmatically, Bacon must have found artistic benefits in avoiding the “original” painting for his appropriation and creation of his series of papal variations. To address these potential advantages, this chapter turns to mechanized reproductions Bacon used and the writings of Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, and Gilles Deleuze for their insights on photography and issues of originality.<sup>22</sup>

#### Photographic Reproductions of *Pope Innocent X* as Working Documents

Reproductions of *Pope Innocent X* allowed the artist to see the work out of context, in smaller sizes, in different tonalities, and juxtaposed with other kinds of images. While many of his process materials were serial in nature or collected in multiples, each individual image displays different deliberate and accidental qualities. For example, *Pope Innocent X Working Document 1* (Figure 44) portrays the painting in black and white. Paperclips bind together edges, and rips show the wear and tear of Bacon and his confined studio space. The paper clips fold the image and alter its overall composition. *Pope Innocent X Working Document 2* (Figure 45), despite its similar production in gray, contains a bluer tint and light markings of paint on the image. Smudges of paint, fingerprint residue, and creases are most evident in *Pope Innocent X Working Document 3* (Figure 46). Streaks of periwinkle paint overwhelm the Pope’s face foreshadowing

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press: 1995); and. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Bacon's blurring of facial details in his papal variations. *Pope Innocent X Working Document 4* (Figure 47) represents one of a number of images barely altered from its initial printed condition. These four process documents found in Bacon's studio and home represent the importance of variety within the collection of reproductions of *Pope Innocent X*. How could owning multiple images in a range of conditions, sizes, and tonalities of the same primary painting benefit Bacon's goals for his series of popes?

Bacon, despite asserting that his process was primarily based on chance, or to use his word "accident," must have been aware of some of the consequences of his artistic process.<sup>23</sup> The artist worked adamantly to downplay and hide the significant role of photography in his work. According to Dennis Farr, late in Bacon's career, a researcher asked the artist if he could view and use his photographic process material as evidence for his scholarly findings. Bacon responded dramatically and grabbed "all the photographs and press cuttings that littered his studio floor, bundled them into two plastic sacks, and made a bonfire of them."<sup>24</sup> By uncovering the elements that the artist hoped to hide about his artistic process, new information can be gleaned as to his intentions and goals for his papal portraits.<sup>25</sup>

Bacon's use of sketch work and preliminary drawings has been hotly contested. After the artist's death in Madrid on April 28, 1992, multiple friends and acquaintances

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<sup>23</sup> Bacon's engagement with chance can be tied to other artistic ventures such as collage, montage, and automatism.

<sup>24</sup> Dennis Farr, "Francis Bacon in Context," in *Francis Bacon: A Retrospective* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 225.

<sup>25</sup> Bacon's self-fashioning practice hindered some scholarly pursuits on the artist. Since the artist's death in 1992 many new publications have shed light on Bacon's process and art. The Estate of Francis Bacon and the Hugh Lane Gallery's relocation of the artist's studio have most significantly fostered these aims at uncovering new information regarding Bacon.

came forward to art museums and auction houses with works on paper attributed to the artist. During his life, Bacon claimed to create preliminary sketches; however, he asserted the significant role of accidental impulses that led to their evolving forms.<sup>26</sup> While the Estate of Francis Bacon has officially disattributed some of these works on paper, namely those brought forward by neighbor and friend Barry Joule, the Hugh Lane Gallery's Francis Bacon Database confirms the existence of Bacon's preliminary work. In 1998, the Gallery found book leaves with loose paint drawings and felt-tip pen markings on them as well as notes jotted down by Bacon planning juxtapositions and compositions of paintings. Bacon claimed, "Painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the stuff down."<sup>27</sup> Chance plays less of a role than what Bacon led the public to believe.

The Gallery also uncovered independent leaves that had been affixed to one another, creating deliberate juxtapositions. For example, Bacon adhered a black and white illustration of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* on one side of a piece of paper with a color image of Ingres's *The Turkish Bath* (1862).<sup>28</sup> Bacon effectively created his own recto and verso images, directly juxtaposing and binding reproductions rather than allowing the studio to do so organically. His removal of leaves from books cyclically returned to a similar form. The artist also pinned and traced cutout profile forms from

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<sup>26</sup> David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Peppiatt. *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 150.

<sup>28</sup> Information on this combination was found through the Francis Bacon Database at the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.

photographic material onto the canvas.<sup>29</sup> His 1953 *Study for Portrait II* (Figure 27) depicts the Pope in profile view and was likely planned as such. This deliberate action in Bacon's process provides support for understanding his smaller sub-series such as the 1953 Blue Popes as a fragmented breakdown of one character and performing a unified movement.<sup>30</sup> Finally, the artist mounted reproductions of his older paintings on the walls of his studio. This allowed him to reference, remember, and appropriate his own work, a practice most evident in his paintings created after 1970. The juxtapositions within those early paintings led to further distillation and fragmentation in later works. Without such self-referential operations, it would have been unlikely for Bacon's fixation with Velázquez' papal portrait to continue. His concluding papal variation references an earlier work and is appropriately titled *Second Version of 'Study for the Red Pope 1962* (Figure 42). Harrison comments on this custom: "His reluctance to divulge more about his image-bank was justified in the sense that it invited reductionism. Recycling a pre-existing image was less meaningful than the unexpected associations he made between it and other images, the transformative power of his interventions."<sup>31</sup>

Through an analysis the artist's self-fashioning and secretive nature on his process, it is clear that Bacon manufactured a practice that appeared to be spontaneous and driven by chance. However, in truth, the artist's method functioned much more deliberately; at times he forced juxtapositions, sketched possible compositions and forms, and situated images against one another to promote a visual interaction. While his process

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<sup>29</sup>Harrison, *In Camera*, 182-183.

<sup>30</sup>Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*.

<sup>31</sup>Harrison, *In Camera*, 83.

materials freely mixed within 7 Reece Mews, Bacon remained ultimately in control of what objects were allowed to join the collection initially. Therefore, Bacon's use of photographic material must be considered as a medium that the artist deliberately used to serve an artistic purpose. The artist employed an extensive collection of mechanized reproductions that he personally selected. After 1962, he commissioned his own photographs. He opted to only see *Pope Innocent X* through the mediation of the camera, and he self-referentially turned to photographs of his own paintings to create his celebrated series of papal portraits.<sup>32</sup>

#### Bacon and Benjamin

In his influential 1935 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin writes on the differences between mechanization of the camera and traditional visually reproductive ventures such as painting: "First, process reproduction is more independent of the original reproduction. For example, in photography, process reproduction can bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens, which is adjustable and chooses its angle at will."<sup>33</sup> The variance of coloring and gradation found in Bacon's process materials of *Pope Innocent X* serve as evidence to the qualities discussed by Benjamin. Some of the reproductions found within 7 Reece Mews present slightly different hues, overarching tints, or even depict the work in a reduced palette of grays. While many of the reproductions of *Pope Innocent X* could be considered of poor quality due to their "unrealistic" coloring, these

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 8-11.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 220.

mimetic discrepancies created through process reproduction alter the reception of the “original” painting. The personality and mood of the Pope changes as does the institutional (the Academy and the Papacy) and artistic control over the painting. Despite creating the “original” portrait, Velázquez was unable to predict or control its contemporary reception, modifications, and proliferation. Bacon embraces the modifications generated by mechanization and its consequences. His papal variations build off of the removal of authorial control. Almost counter intuitively, Bacon’s reproductions of *Pope Innocent X* displayed details that were lacking in the “original” painting and in firsthand encounters with the portrait. Harrison accentuates this positive element embodied in Bacon’s compendium of reproductions when he writes,

The amassing of multiple copies of the most suggestive photographs was paralleled by his acquisitiveness in respect of reproductions of certain paintings such as Velázquez’s *Pope Innocent X*. . . The extent of this hoarding was a Baconian phenomenon, and implies that he saw nuances of scale, definition and colour as potentially revelatory of fresh means of employing images in his iconoclastic recombinations.<sup>34</sup>

Harrison’s statement points to the idiosyncratic nature of Bacon’s process of painting and how in working in a manner foundationally grounded in the mediation of photography, the artist was able to deconstruct the “original” Velázquez painting by creating a timely, dynamic series of papal variations composed of disparate visual fragments.

By removing the painting from its “original” context (through the mediation of the camera), Velázquez’ *Pope Innocent X*, should according to Benjamin’s terms, lose its “aura.” Benjamin described his term, the aura: “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence

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<sup>34</sup>Harrison, *In Camera*.

at the place where it happens to be.” However, by relying solely on reproductions of *Pope Innocent X*, Bacon’s repetitious use of photographic reproductions and avoidance of the “original” painting actually increases the “aura” of Velázquez’ painting. Benjamin’s claims on mechanization’s removal of “aura” are negated through Bacon’s artistic process. As such, the Galleria Doria Pamphili’s assertions of the portrait’s “originality” are applicable, despite Bacon’s avoidance of the curated space. Bacon’s papal variations rely on the unique status of the individual art object, even although the artist never engaged with the painting firsthand. His personal interest in the portrait, repetitious use of photographs of the painting, and appropriation of the image uphold the prominent position of the singular art object.

Bacon’s sole reliance on photographic reproductions might abdicate the trappings attached to the renowned artist Velázquez, the grandeur and spiritual power of the Papacy, and the wealth and unity of the art collection at the Galleria Doria Pamphili. However, it is the removal of these markings of initial context (not the “aura”) that provide the necessary framework for the effective fusion of different fragments of photographic imagery in Bacon’s papal series. Bacon’s collecting activity was not constricted to reproductions of works of art. Within the walls of his studio, he amassed and appropriated from a substantial amount of photographic materials pertaining to medicine, film, motion studies, the supernatural, and animals, among other genres. It is within this photographic collection of non-art images that Bacon’s removal of the “aura” through the use of art reproductions becomes particularly important. By removing the “aura” from paintings, such as *Pope Innocent X*, Bacon provided the needed environment for art and non-art images to interact and come together evenly. Harrison notes, “Bacon’s

consumption of imagery was, in a sense, non-hierarchical. Irrespective of an image's original state as a photograph or painting it was homogenized—democratized—by its reproduction through a mechanical screen.”<sup>35</sup> Bacon's utilization of mechanical reproduction in the fashioning of his papal variations operates independently of conventions set forth and maintained by institutions such as the Academy, the Canon, and the Papacy. The process of mechanization diminishes notable characteristics that demarcate the line between painting and photography. Institutional distinctions between high art and low art, fact and fiction, scientific and supernatural, are no longer relevant or enforceable. Bacon reinforced this concept by saying, “Some photographers are artists but I'm not particularly interested in that aspect of photography.”<sup>36</sup> However, Bacon's statement does not correlate with his activity. He interacted with photographs after an artist's particular work and the visual mutations caused by the camera; these interests speak to the aesthetic role of mechanization.

#### Mechanization and Juxtaposition in 7 Reece Mews

Benjamin continues his essay on the mechanization of photography and the proliferation of the work of art, “Secondly, technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.”<sup>37</sup> The artist's studio at 7 Reece Mews is a testament to Benjamin's point. Many recent art-historical writings focused on the chaos of cluttered boxes of images, destroyed canvases, stacks of books

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin, 220-221.



and dried up paint materials that over-ran his studio space.<sup>38</sup> Bacon's studio allowed for the jumbling of different images and ideas. Bacon said of visual efficacy, "one image against the other seems to be able to say the thing more."<sup>39</sup> Juxtaposition is crucial to Bacon's artistic production.<sup>40</sup> His collection of reproductions was not articulately kept or well maintained. Rather, his process materials acted as scattered groundcover, an archive for research, purposeful disarray, and public evidence to support his "crazed" bohemian persona. Bacon wrote, "I feel at home here in the chaos because the chaos suggests images to me."<sup>41</sup> The artist's words, again sustaining and emphasizing the element of chance in his work, also speak to his paradoxical thoughts on the generative nature of destruction. The mess of the studio, caused by the accidental and deliberate demolition of canvases, books, and materials, provides the environment for the generation of new ideas and visual schemes that were unavailable or unapparent to Bacon.

#### Bacon and Process Materials: Medical, Animal, and Film Imagery

Photographs from medical textbooks documenting skin ailments, diseases of the mouth, and other health concerns make up part of Bacon's process materials. For instance, he

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<sup>38</sup> Some of the major texts include Harrison, *In Camera*; Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (London: Merrell, 2005); and John Edwards, *7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Juxtaposition of images has often been employed in earlier art movements, such as Cubism. However, it is important that Bacon uses juxtaposition differently by allowing the combinations to occur organically. Rather than deliberately juxtaposing conflicting images that he conceived, Bacon allows the his engagement with the studio to lead the image. The juxtapositions in the studio but not present on the canvas are just as important to the final image as the completed painting.

<sup>41</sup> Margarita Cappock, "The Chemist's Laboratory: Francis Bacon's Studio." In *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art* (Milan: Skira, 2003), 85.

owned K.C. Clark's 1939 text *Positioning in Radiography*, a book that included over 2500 black and white images of human bodies situated for x-ray procedures (Figure 48).<sup>42</sup> Bacon first referenced an x-ray image in 1933.<sup>43</sup> While images produced by x-ray machines are scientific and documentary in nature, they also have the potential to distort reality. Bacon possessed a copy of Baron Albert von Schrenck Notzing's *Phenomena of Materialisation* that chronicled séances through photography (Figure 49).<sup>44</sup> The black and white images use "supernatural" beams of light as documentation of what is not visibly apparent to the naked eye. The book's photographs recall x-rays in visual and ideological terms. Images produced through x-rays parallel photographic material. Like photography, x-rays dually function as a subjective and objective machine. Their mechanically based processes can support fact and fiction equally. Bacon's use of these devices suggests his interest in society's formation of "truth." If these mechanized techniques could produce an artificial "reality"—an image that understood by the audience as "real," then how could he dismantle paintings that also establish themselves as documentation of "real" power such as in Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*.

Bacon's interest in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin* caused him to amass multiple books of film stills of it. Roger Manvell's 1944 book *Film* contained two double-page spreads that highlighted twelve key black and white stills of *Battleship Potemkin* (Figure 41).<sup>45</sup> Bacon said, "You could say that a scream is a horrific image; in fact, I wanted to paint the scream more than the horror. I think if I had really thought

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<sup>42</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 90.

about what causes somebody to scream it would have made the scream that I tried to paint more successful.”<sup>46</sup> The artist’s statement substantiates his interest in depicting human sensation rather than physical violence.

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s exploration of Bacon’s oeuvre in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* focuses on the artist’s employment of imagery that stresses painting sensation instead of representation.<sup>47</sup> Deleuze claims that,

Sensation is the opposite of the facile and the ready-made, the cliché, but also of the “sensational,” the spontaneous, etc. Sensation has one face turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, “instinct”)...and one face turned toward the object (the “fact,” the place, the event.) Or rather, it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly...it is in the same body that, being both subject and object, give and receives the sensation.<sup>48</sup>

Bacon’s papal variations fit within Deleuze’s definition of a work of sensation. The Popes are simultaneously the object and subject. Their scream causes the audience to place them in the role of the victim (the object), yet the lack of physical aggressors on the canvas causes the same audience to consider the Pope self-inflicting his pain (the subject). Likewise, the Pope’s conflicting identities as a victim in physical duress and as a spiritual authority and intercessor to God in the Roman Catholic Church, creates a complicated duality present in Deleuze’s discussion of sensation. The context (or to use Deleuze’s term “fact”) of the position and the history of the Papacy run counter to the physical and mental response of the Pope’s nervous system. The artist said, “I think that great art is deeply ordered. Even if within the order there may be enormously instinctive

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<sup>46</sup> Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, 29-30.

<sup>47</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

and accidental things, nevertheless I think that they come out of a desire for ordering and for returning fact to the nervous system in a more violent way.”<sup>49</sup> Bacon’s interest in the response of the human nervous system extended further the Battleship Potemkin film still.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Bacon’s words attest to the role of chance and accident in his painting process. For him, order stems from a human impulse. Artists that attempt to establish order through the creation of the painting, according to Bacon, will always be acting in a field of chance. Pushing this even more, Bacon claims that the urge to control cannot ignore accidental changes that alter the artist’s constructed order. Chance and accident attack the nervous system because they question the extent of human control over their surrounding environment and perception of “reality.”

Bacon often connected humankind and animals. Humans and animals both at their foundational level are bodies with a functioning nervous system that guides survival activity. The interrelation of humans and animals in Bacon’s mind carries over into his collecting and painting practice. The Hugh Lane Francis Bacon Database catalogued photographs of meat warehouses and illustrations of cuts of meat.<sup>51</sup> Aside from painting figurative works, Bacon depicted owls and monkeys independently and also as accompanying figures in some of his series of papal variations. By connecting humans and animals, Bacon removes the civility surrounding mankind. Depictions of man portray an animal-- a hunk of meat and flesh.

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<sup>49</sup>Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 58-59.

<sup>50</sup> Bacon’s interest in open mouths extended to images of mouth diseases and asthma information. For more information on the range and specifics of these working documents consult the Hugh Lane Gallery Francis Bacon Database.

<sup>51</sup> Hugh Lane Gallery, Francis Bacon Database.

Bacon underscores this relationship between humans and meat in two of his papal variations: *Figure with Meat* (1954) (Figure 11) and *Pope II* (1960) (Figure 37). *Figure with Meat* depicts a pope in blue vestments; two large flanks of brightly colored beef surround his form in the center of the canvas. The raw meat recalls Bacon's earlier Crucifixion paintings that fostered his first large publication and critical attention in Herbert Read's text *Art Now*. A directional black arrow pierces the left flank iconographically connecting the work with John's Gospel account of Christ's Crucifixion and the related imagery of the Holy Lance that bore into his side. In *Pope II*, the use of beef carcass is much more tame. The proportionally smaller chunk of raw meat sits on a cube form that reads as a table, to the side of the Pope. The juxtaposition of the Pope and raw meat, not only draws connections between human and animal kind, it also serves as a reflection on death and religion.

By painting these subjects against one another, Bacon investigates timely questions pertaining to human nature, the role of religion, and certainty of death for all living things. Bacon's combinations also could be seen as mocking the authority of the Catholic Church. If humans are no more than animals, what is the role of God in relationship to people? What position of authority could the Pope actually hold? Are institutions such as the Church even relevant if mankind is just an animal?

Bacon's interests, in uncovering the "truth" behind sensation, human nature, and the human body, recall the pursuits of early anatomists. The artist's photographic images dissect the human body and activity. Medical textbooks focus on parts of the human body for isolating illness. Motion studies break a singular movement into distinct segments. Film stills freeze moving narratives into fragmented photographs. Dissection

scientifically and methodically removes layers of the human body in hopes of discovery of knowledge. Renaissance anatomists hoped to gain control over the health of the human body through medical dissection and, as a consequence, their social practice in major cities in Western Europe such as Brussels and London led to classist implications in institutional systems such as law and religion.<sup>52</sup> British historian Jonathan Sawday writes in his introduction to *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, “The ‘culture of dissection’ is, then, the culture of enquiry: an incisive recomposition of the human body, which entailed an equivalent refashioning of the means by which people made sense of the world around them in terms of their philosophy of understanding, their theology, their poetry, their plays, their rituals of justice, their art, and their buildings.”<sup>53</sup> Bacon’s use of dissection imagery parallels his interest in photographic processes. Photography, in its very nature, fragments the unity of the object into a brief objective interaction between the object and the machine of the camera. As such, photographic material only represents one brief moment in time, a fragment. This repetitious creation of fragments can be read as a dissection of the ongoing life of an image. Sawday’s words articulate the process of investigation and deconstruction inherent in dissection. His statement also conflates the cultural production of a society with the urge to dissect.

Bacon’s varied images appear to have little in common, but they all display elements of repetition and fragmentation. Like Bacon’s collection of multiple images of

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<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Sawday, ix.

the painting *Pope Innocent X*, the majority of these images appear numerous times in the studio. For example, the Hugh Lane Gallery documented Eadweard Muybridge's photographs from four separate copies of the 1955 abridged volume of *The Human Figure in Motion*, as well as an edition of *Animal Locomotion*, and independent leaves.<sup>54</sup> Multiple copies of the same "original" image within the studio space would have created a repetitious organic pattern of appearing and disappearing into a pile.

Since its inception, photography has been dually bound to the opposing roles of documentary and creative, objective and subjective. The subjective elements, such as the alteration of tone, size, gradation, and contrast permit Bacon to understand the painting of *Pope Innocent X* as purely a reproduced image without its original context. However, the documentary nature of the camera allows the photographs of the painting to be understood as "facts." The reproductions of *Pope Innocent X* still are copies of the "original" painting. Understood as serving simultaneously both positions of fact and fiction, Bacon's papal portraits through their process (reliant on photography) deconstruct and fragment the viewer's understanding of artistic and religious institutions, such as the Academy and the Papacy. Bacon's papal variations do not merely appropriate from Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, but in using Velázquez' work comment on the entire compilation of seated papal portraits beginning with Raphael's portrait of Julius II. The history of the genre of "official" seated papal portraits functions as a propagandistic program bolstering the power of the Papacy. The opposing positions of fact and fiction inherent in photography, when used in Bacon's variations, set the framework for deconstruction of the systems referenced through appropriation.

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<sup>54</sup>Harrison, *In Camera*, 10-11.

### Bacon and Simulacra

Bacon's use of mechanized reproduction to create his series of papal variations and its inherent use of repetition, fragmentation, and enhancement of the "aura," concerns issues of originality, in particular the role of simulacra. Bacon did not need to consult the "original" painting for his papal series to be successful. Instead, quite the opposite is true. The repetitious hunt and holding pattern for process materials allows Bacon to see nuances in mechanized images and investigate issues of originality. For Bacon, there is no "original" reproduction. One mechanically reproduced image does not and cannot value itself as more significant than any other. Repetitious activity is also inherent to the field of photography. Photography's modern innovation allows for and intends to be circulated in multiples, at its very least in editions. It is through these conditions of repetition, mechanization, and fragmentation that Bacon delves into portraying the simulacral.

French critical theorist Jean Baudrillard discusses issues of the "original" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1985).<sup>55</sup> By claiming that society's notions of the real are conflated with artificial simulations, Baudrillard argues that the world is actualized in constructed models of simulacra or the hyperreal. Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and the hyperreal conceptually connect with Bacon's papal variations. The artist's papal works are, in effect, serial copies of one another. Earlier works impact later works that inevitably reference one another due to Bacon's studio practice. Additionally, by basing his variations on reproductions of images found in books containing Velázquez' painting, Bacon's papal series foundationally relies on simulacral activity. Mechanized

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<sup>55</sup>Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.



reproductions of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* offers further mediation from the real. Baudrillard writes in *The Precession of Simulacra*, "it is the camera lens that, like a laser, comes to pierce lived reality in order to put it to death."<sup>56</sup> Bacon's use of the camera in his process supplied the framework necessary to question the power and authority vested in the Papacy.

### Baudrillard's Three Categories of Simulacra and Bacon's Papal Variations

Baudrillard defines three categories of simulacra: natural simulacra, productive simulacra, and simulacra of simulation.<sup>57</sup> Bacon's process employs all of Baudrillard's orders in the creation of his papal variations. According to the philosopher, natural simulacra are "naturalist, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit...that aim for the restitution or the ideal institution of nature made in God's image."<sup>58</sup> Velázquez' portrait of *Pope Innocent X*, like all mimetically based art, fits within the definition of natural simulacra. Even more so than other papal portraitists, Velázquez' depiction of Pope Innocent X has been noted for its extreme attention to mimetic details. Innocent X is rumored to have disliked the portrait due to its unflattering likeness.<sup>59</sup> Velázquez' painting embodies the simulacra by attempting to artistically represent the person and likeness of Pope Innocent X. The image of the person exists only as a façade, a sign of the living person.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>59</sup> Didactic at Galleria Doria Pamphilli

Bacon's use of photography in his process of painting fits within the limits of Baudrillard's second category of productive simulacra. Productive simulacra are defined by Baudrillard as "productivist, founded on energy, force, its materialization by the machine and in the whole system of production—a Promethean aim of a continuous globalization and expansion."<sup>60</sup> Bacon's sole reliance on mechanized reproductions of *Pope Innocent X* embodies the elements of productive simulacra. The machine of the camera allows for the repetition and the global proliferation of images. Baudrillard's third version of simulacra, simulacra of simulation, is "founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game—total operationality, hyperreality, [and] aim of total control."<sup>61</sup> The history of seated papal portraits outlined and sustained by the Academy, the institution of the Papacy, and the religious tradition of Roman Catholicism all fit within this order. Each of these institutions works to create a system and ordered model under which people follow guidelines set forth to control and discipline behavior. Baudrillard's analysis of simulacra aids understanding of Bacon's papal variations through its examination of simulacra activity, products, and institutions. Reading Bacon's papal portraits through such a lens links and uncovers the underlying issues in his paintings, ones that engage issues of originality in their conception, process, and result.

Bacon's papal variations can also be understood as precessional simulacra. They disturb the understanding of Velázquez' seventeenth-century portrait. Where does the line fall between the real and the simulacral in the interaction of Bacon's papal portraits, the mediation of mechanical reproduction, Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, the sitter Pope

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<sup>60</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 121.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Innocent X (Giovanni Battista Pamphili), and the authority of the Papacy? For Baudrillard, each entity is hyperreal, illustrating the instability of signs and meaning. Given this metastable relationship between signs and meaning, constructed models allow for breaking of time from a linear, chronological continuum into a non-linear model. Baudrillard wrote:

Simulation is characterized by a *precession of the model*, of all the models based on the merest fact...The facts no longer have a specific trajectory, they are born at the intersection of models, a single fact can be engendered by all the models at once. This anticipation, this precession, this short circuit, this confusion of the fact with its model...is what allows each time for all possible interpretations even the most contradictory—all true, in the sense that their truth is to be exchanged, in the image of the models from which they derive.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, Bacon's papal variations should be understood as paintings that convey simulation and not representation. He removes his portraits from their representational ties—clear trajectories between sign and meaning no longer exist. Bacon's papal paintings function in their intersection and juxtaposition of artificial models. They highlight the “murderous power of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model.”<sup>63</sup> The artist's papal portraits murder the real and act as a powerful substitute for the real.

As a figurative artist, Bacon strives to “tear down the veils that fact acquires through time.”<sup>64</sup> Through his papal variations, the artist re-examines the position of artistic and religious institutions by visually deconstructing the work through his photographically-based process, portrayal of sensation. Applying simulacral theory to his

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Davies and Yard, *Francis Bacon*, 110.

papal variations provides insights as to how Bacon's process could affect the viewer's understanding of the "original" and the construction of institutions around them. Bacon's series of papal portraits depict the discomfort of the truth--the visual embodiment of the Academy and the Papacy without their "veils," institutions seeking control and structure in the hope of presiding over humankind which to Bacon is no more than just meat and flesh, even animal in nature. Bacon's interest in Velázquez and his portrait of *Pope Innocent X* functions as more than just a source for appropriation. Bacon's papal variations depended on the use of photographic reproductions of the Velázquez portrait in order to create a series that depicted sensation and provided the framework for his audience to reflect on the simulacral "reality" of their own lives. This thesis now looks back at the root of Bacon's appropriation, the Velázquez portrait. In so doing, it aims to place Bacon's papal portraits within the genre of seated papal portraits. As established in this chapter, the artist's use of photography enhanced the "aura" of the painting, despite Bacon's lack of firsthand interaction with it. Read as such, Bacon's variations off of the work closely fit with pre-existing portrayals of popes and should be examined within this artistic tradition.

CHAPTER IV  
 PUSHING CONVENTIONS OF TRADITION: BACON, VELÁZQUEZ, AND THE  
 ART-HISTORICAL CANON

“I buy book after book with this illustration in it of the Velázquez *Pope*, because it just haunts me, and opens up all sorts of feelings and areas of—I was going to say—imagination, even, in me.”  
 -Francis Bacon<sup>1</sup>

Throughout history, artists have turned to earlier painters and their works for reasons such as education, inspiration, and social commentary. Scholars such as Wieland Schmied assert that Bacon’s fascination with Velázquez’ *Pope Innocent X* (Figure 2) borders on an obsessive fixation.<sup>2</sup> In regards to his interest, Bacon replied, “Well it’s one of the most beautiful pictures in the world and I think I’m not at all exceptional as a painter in being obsessed by it.”<sup>3</sup> To Bacon, his fascination with the painting is not markedly different from any other person’s. While Bacon did look to earlier works of art such as paintings and drawings by Georges Seurat and Vincent van Gogh, classical Greek

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<sup>1</sup> David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Wieland Schmied, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1996) focuses a great deal on his fear and obsession with portrait. The text, in my opinion, dramatizes Bacon’s life and biography. While, I do find Bacon’s interest in *Pope Innocent X* intense, I find it difficult to believe he was tormented by the image and his admiration for Velázquez.

<sup>3</sup> David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 72.

statues, and Egyptian art for inspiration, he did not repeat their subject matter to the same extent or in the same way as he did with Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*.<sup>4</sup> The artist's intense devotion to *Pope Innocent X* begs the following questions: How do Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* and Bacon's papal variations fit within the tradition of seated papal portraits? And, what is the relationship between Bacon and Velázquez in regards to the traditional art-historical canon? To explore these queries, this chapter discusses Velázquez' artistic career and his creation of *Pope Innocent X*, the connection between Velázquez and Bacon, and the reception of Bacon's work.

#### Velázquez and the Creation of *Pope Innocent X*

In 1648, Velázquez journeyed on his second trip by boat to Rome to acquire works of art for the Spanish monarchy. However, while working for the court in a curatorial sort of position, Velázquez painted portraits for his personal purposes including his portrait of Pope Innocent X.<sup>5</sup> Employing the papal court as subject matter can be read as a social and political move to gain favor from the Roman Catholic Church. In 1999, Jonathan Brown wrote in an essay on Velázquez' identity as an artist and a gentleman "In addition, the stay in Rome provided an opportunity to pursue a personal goal, to petition Pope Innocent X for support in his quest for membership in the knightly Order of Santiago."<sup>6</sup> The formation of powerful social networks would have benefited Velázquez in his pursuit

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<sup>4</sup> Bacon also copied works by van Gogh. However, I find these less influential due to their relatively small number and isolated years of production. For more information on his van Gogh studies, see Brendan Prendeville. "Varying the Self: Bacon's Versions of van Gogh," *Oxford Art Journal* 27 (2004): 23-42.

<sup>5</sup> Dawson W. Carr, *Velazquez*, exh. cat. (London: National Gallery, 2006), 221.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Brown, *Collected Writings on Velazquez* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 191.

of noble status, particularly entry into the esteemed Order of Santiago (also known as Order of Saint James of Compostela). The Order only admitted Catholic believers of noble birth and was regarded as the most prestigious of Spanish knighthoods.<sup>7</sup>

Velázquez' sitter, Giovanni Battista Pamphili, became Pope Innocent X in 1644. The artist depicted him only six years after his inauguration, on August 13, 1650. Thus, the portrait represents a relatively recent international, religious, and political event as well as depicting one of the most powerful leaders in the world at the time. By portraying the Pope in a painting, Velázquez could also potentially "ensure his international fame."<sup>8</sup> Innocent X only sat for a few prominent artists such as Gianlorenzo Bernini and Alessandro Algardi.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, despite Bernini's high level of artistic skill, Innocent X refused to employ his work. Given this context, it could be read that Velázquez' employment by the Papacy after Bernini's removal placed him in a position of heightened artistic rank. Innocent X would not employ the distinguished Italian architect and sculptor Bernini, but would rather allow a Spanish court painter to depict his image and by extension the Papacy and entire Roman Catholic Church. Velázquez, after completing *Pope Innocent X*, thereby bolstered his artistic reputation internationally, especially in the arena of elite portraiture.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Carr, *Velazquez*, 221.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 222.

### Britain and Velázquez

Eighteenth-century British portrait artist and first president of the Royal Society of Arts Sir Joshua Reynolds claimed that *Pope Innocent X* was among the best paintings in the world.<sup>10</sup> Reynolds was by no means the only British citizen who praised Spanish art. A strong British desire for Spanish art continued to grow well into the nineteenth century, resulting in a substantial number of Spanish works in British private and public collections. In an 1848 catalogue raisonné on Velázquez, Sir William Stirling located almost one-third of the artist's paintings in Britain.<sup>11</sup> Today, the number of works by Velázquez stands much lower at eighteen.<sup>12</sup> However, with nine paintings attributed to the artist hanging in the National Gallery in London, British artists continued to be influenced by the artistic style and tradition created by Velázquez. British interest in the painting is also evidenced by a copy after Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* exhibited at the Apsley House at The Wellington Museum in London.<sup>13</sup>

*Pope Innocent X* and Velázquez' influence in Great Britain continued to spread, eventually reaching Bacon. As discussed in the previous chapter, the artist did not encounter the "original" painting firsthand during the time in which he worked on his papal variations. The proliferation of books on Velázquez containing images of *Pope Innocent X* throughout Britain made Bacon's papal series possible. Almost functioning

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 92. More than 70 Velázquez paintings out of 226 works were located in Britain.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *Collected Writings on Velázquez* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 131-137. Brown's short text on *Pope Innocent X* discusses copies after the image and the conservation and scientific studies conducted to determine the steps of replication.



symbiotically, Bacon's life and work propelled the reputation and publicity of *Pope Innocent X* by continually referencing it.

### Bacon and the National Gallery's *The Artist's Eye* Program

In October of 1985, the National Gallery in London unveiled an exhibition curated by Bacon as a part of *The Artist's Eye* program.<sup>14</sup> The National Gallery invited Bacon, as they did other prominent British painters, such as Victor Pasmore, Bridget Riley and Patrick Caulfield, to select artworks from the museum's collection to show in conjunction with a few of his own paintings. Bacon accepted the curatorial invitation but refused to display his artwork alongside his selections from the museum. His eclectic exhibition included eighteen oil paintings created by Masaccio, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Goya, Turner, van Gogh, Degas, Manet, Seurat, and, of course, Velázquez. Bacon's choices for *The Artist's Eye* exhibition highlight his approach to previous painters and their work. Significantly, Bacon's curatorial decisions focused on male Western painters from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century and their figurative subject matter. For example, Bacon chose Velázquez's *Portrait of Philip IV of Spain* (1625) (Figure 51) and *The Rokeby Venus* (1647-1651) (Figure 52). Bacon's curatorial choices also reflect on established figural traditions upheld by the art-historical canon. Barbara Steffen wrote of Bacon's interest in redefining these conventions: "Bacon's objective is not so much to represent masculine identity as it is to point out that masculinity is a construct, a stereotype which he fights, making his figures appear weak and unstable by virtue of

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<sup>14</sup> The National Gallery, London had previously invited and exhibited *The Artist's Eye* shows with R.J. Kitaj, Howard Hughes, and David Hockney.

their positions and the technique used to paint them.”<sup>15</sup> Steffen’s statement accentuates the artist’s desire to expose the canon’s acceptance of a cast of ‘stereotypical’ characters. Thus, the human form for Bacon is a vehicle for dismantling traditional models of painting and representation.

Bacon previously identified many of the artists presented in his exhibition as influences in his work by way of extensive interviews documented and conducted by Sylvester and Archimbaud. In an interview with Sylvester, Bacon discussed Michelangelo’s influence on his figurative work: “And I’ve always thought about Michelangelo; he’s always been deeply important in my way of thinking about form. But although I have this profound admiration for all his work, the work that I like most of all is the drawings. For me he is one of the very greatest draughtsmen, if not the greatest.”<sup>16</sup> Bacon’s primary interest in Michelangelo’s drawings parallels his attraction to Seurat’s work. In an interview with Archimbaud, Bacon claimed, “I admire Seurat a lot. We have perhaps one of his best pictures here in London, *Bathers of Asnieres*, which I think is a magnificent work...But above all I like his sketches.”<sup>17</sup> Among Bacon’s selections for *The Artist’s Eye* exhibition were preparatory works and fragmented canvases, such as oil sketches by Seurat and the canvas pieces of Manet’s *The Execution of Maximilian* (1867-1868) (Figure 53) compiled by Degas.

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Steffen, “The Representation of the Body: Velázquez-Bacon” in *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, eds. Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Steffen and Christoph Vitali (Milan: Skira Editore, 2003), 205.

<sup>16</sup> Sylvester. *The Brutality of Fact*, 114.

<sup>17</sup> Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation*, 44.

Looking at and esteeming earlier artists' works could have functioned as an alternative art education for Bacon. Unlike Velázquez and many of the artists he discussed or referenced, Bacon was self-trained. Traditional art training requires the ability to understand and convey the form of the human body from life studies. Bacon lacked this conventional education and actually saw the presence of his sitter as "inhibiting" his work.<sup>18</sup> Bacon claimed that often his sitters felt uncomfortable due to his fragmenting of their form, an activity that Sylvester has referred to as the "violence" that Bacon paints on the canvas, and thereby inflicts upon the sitter. While these reasons are valid, it seems more likely that Bacon wanted to avoid the "original" subject, as he did with the Velázquez portrait. Avoiding the "original" allowed him to fully explore the possibilities present in process of mechanized reproduction, thereby enabling the repetition and fragmentation of the human sitter. As photographs or partial memories of interactions with the individuals, Bacon could mesh many concepts that carried contrasting meaning. Much like his investigation and deconstruction of the authority of the Papacy, Bacon's lack of formal education and his avoidance of live sitters in the creation of his paintings allowed him to operate outside of conventional institutions and as a result question their position in society.

#### Bacon and His "Reinterpretation" of Figurative Painting

However, Bacon's training in painting derived in part from his examination of reproductions and "originals" of earlier artists' work. All the painters selected by Bacon in the National Gallery exhibition show a different kind of mastery over the tradition of

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<sup>18</sup>Sylvester. *The Brutality of Fact*, 40.

figure painting. Much like his studio at 7 Reece Mews, *The Artist's Eye* reads as a visual study of Bacon's own artistic concerns and priorities. By juxtaposing works made by artists accepted into the art-historical canon, Bacon articulates the stylistic shifts found in the history of depicting the human form from the Renaissance to his time. Bacon's papal portraits and Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, therefore, should be considered according to their innovations to their depictions of the human figure. Davies wrote of Velázquez and Bacon: "In much the same spirit that Velázquez went to Rome, determined to vie with the state portraits of Titian and remake them in the image of his time, Bacon's papal variations are his attempt to reinvent or reinterpret Velázquez's image in a way that would be valid for the mid-twentieth century."<sup>19</sup> Davies' concept of "reinventing/reinterpreting" asserts the importance of stylistic shifts in the depiction of the human form within both painters' practices. Velázquez challenged Raphael and Titian's model of papal portraits. Bacon followed in this behavior and challenged Velázquez. Therefore, the foundation of Bacon's interest in *Pope Innocent X* lays in Velázquez' stylistic breaks from the accepted mode of depicting the human figure, in this case, the Pope.

#### A Brief History of Seated Papal Portraits—Beginning with Raphael's *Julius II*

Historically, papal portrait iconography shifted from a devotional, spiritual focus to an emphasis on the power of the Papacy in state affairs.<sup>20</sup> Stylistically, Velázquez continued in many of the conventions of the casual seated portrait type established in 1511 by

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<sup>19</sup> Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Steffen, "The Papal Portraits," 115-132.

Raphael in *Julius II* (Figure 5). Raphael's painting portrays the spiritual and political authority of Julius II differently from his predecessors by focusing on his individualism. Introspectively staring out to the lower right portion of the canvas, Julius II sits seemingly unaware of a viewer. In so doing, Raphael's composition creates a voyeuristic audience, encountering the Pope in what reads as a genuinely "natural" moment. His aged face, accentuated by his sagging cheeks, furrowed brow, and white facial hair, does not support idealized propagandistic readings of state or religious power. For example, earlier papal paintings depicted the pope in action, blessing crowds of people, clothed in extravagant papal vestments, most notably the three-tier papal tiara. Instead, Raphael's compositional and stylistic decisions create a portrait interested in the idiosyncratic personality of the aging sitter. By focusing on the individuality of the Pope, Raphael creates a more personal dynamic between Julius II and the viewer. The portrait's powerful impact roots from the painting's intimacy with the subject. The audience interacts with *this* sitter, *this* man, *this* Pope rather than the historical authority of the entire Papacy. Arnold Nesselrath wrote of the artist Raphael, the sitter Julius II, and the resulting portrait, "Here the extraordinary interaction between patron and artist is ultimately manifest. It is no surprise therefore that the portrait became the most influential of all papal likenesses."<sup>21</sup>

Nesselrath's statement is evidenced by Titian's painting *Paul III* (Figure 20) that followed in Raphael's seated naturalized style. Paul III sits slightly hunched in the papal seat evoking the sense of a gentle personality. Despite Titian's decision to push Paul III

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<sup>21</sup> Hugo Chapman, Tom Henry, Carol Plazzotta, Arnold Nesselrath, and Nicholas Penny, eds. *Raphael: From Urbino to Rome*, exh cat. (London: National Gallery, 2004), 281.

forward toward the picture plane, the viewer's relationship with the powerful authority remains like Raphael's *Julius II*, personal and non-confrontational. Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* continued in Raphael's and Titian's tradition of naturalistically depicted popes. This continuity is not surprising considering Velázquez' tendency and skill in mimetic "realism," a talent emphasized throughout his oeuvre and by art historians subsequently.

However, Velázquez reinterprets the seated papal portrait type by articulating the complex psychology of Innocent X. Visual likeness for Velázquez relies heavily on the sitter's inner character and personality. Importantly, Velázquez creates the perception of more space between the viewer and the Pope than in Raphael and Titian's depictions. Without this additional space, interaction between Innocent X and the viewer would be too intense and uncomfortable to sustain. Unlike Raphael's *Julius II*, Innocent X sits fully upright and makes direct eye contact with the viewer. His strong skeptical gaze penetrates his audience. His slightly pursed lips read as personal irritation and disapproval toward the viewer. This visual discomfort accurately reflects psychology and personality of Innocent X. Steffen wrote, "Innocent's physiognomy was so repulsive and his wrath and displeasure towards his subordinates was occasionally so great that some of the cardinals in the papal conclave had spoken out against his election."<sup>22</sup>

In other regards, however, Velázquez' papal depiction fits within the limits of earlier papal portrait types. Like Raphael's *Julius II*, Titian's *Paul III* and the majority of papal portraiture after them, Innocent X sits on a *sedes gestatoria* (portable papal throne). Velázquez also retains continuity with earlier papal depictions through the sitter's

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<sup>22</sup> Steffen, "The Papal Portraits," 116.

costume. Innocent X wears a crimson *carnauro* (square cap with three peaks) and *mozzetta* (short cape) over a long flowing white vestment. He wears a topaz and gold ring on his right hand. By wearing these articles rather than other elaborate wardrobe pieces such as the three-tier papal tiara, Innocent X upholds the casual iconography initiated by Raphael. Innocent X casually holds a piece of paper in his left hand; the document notes Velázquez as the artist of the work and connects the portrait iconographically with earlier papal portraits. Velázquez also maintains the three-quarter view, a convention most-commonly applied to portraits.

Bacon's fixation on *Pope Innocent X* lies in Velázquez' ability to balance tradition and innovation. Velázquez alters the reception of the papal portrait, shifting it from personable and non-threatening to psychological and intimidating. The painter breaks from tradition and redefines the power of the Church, all while gaining critical success and recognition. John Russell claimed in his famous biography on Bacon "In so far as he was 'influenced' by Velázquez, however, the influence was more subtle than the mere borrowing of a motif... Velázquez's genius lay in the deformations, which in his hands looked inevitable. Bacon was also moved by the element of continuity in Velázquez."<sup>23</sup> Russell's words reflect the artistic tension between innovation and tradition found in Velázquez' work, and perhaps, most visually evident in his portrait *Pope Innocent X*.

Broadly, Velázquez' artistic style and career show his consistent interest in the psychology of his sitters, economic handling of paint, stark backgrounds, and aspiration for a noble status. Bacon's use of these signature Velázquezian elements with traditional

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<sup>23</sup> Russell. *Francis Bacon*, 46.

iconographic papal subject matter provide the basis for visual dialogue between Bacon's papal portraits, Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, genre of seated papal portraits found the works previously discussed by Raphael and Titian, and the art-historical canon.

While Bacon's forty-four papal oil paintings differ from one another, some general similarities can be found in the series. Almost all of the papal portraits depict the *sedia gestatoria*, *carnauro*, and *mozzetta*. The consistency of papal garb and furniture is crucial to understanding Bacon's variations within the tradition of commissioned seated papal portraits. It connects Bacon's twentieth-century painting with Raphael's sixteenth-century *Julius II*, charting the influence of the casual seated papal portrait type. The papal chair, cap, and cape identify the figure as a pope. In doing so, they also reinforce symbolic readings of religious and political power vested in papal authority.

Additionally, the papal vestments and furniture hold great significance in understanding the complex relationships of the figure and identity of the Pope, the institution of the Papacy, the Pope's human body, the Pope's spiritual body, and the metaphorical body of the church. To understand Bacon's deviations from the accepted tradition of papal portraits, one must problematize the identity of the sitter, the Pope. Velázquez' depiction effectively represents the multifaceted roles of the Pope. The man, institution, literal and metaphorical body are all emphasized through his realistic portrayal that includes details of the papal office, documents, vestments, furniture, family background, and individual character of Pope Innocent X. Bacon's papal series breaks from this convention to blur the individualized identity of the appropriated Pope. Despite turning to this particular painting, Bacon is not especially interested in this specific Pope. His paintings do not work to replicate the likeness found in Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*.



Instead, Bacon's variations rely on portraying the larger institution of the Papacy. Contemporary audiences for Bacon's series do not need to know details on Giovanni Battista Pamphili's life in order for the works to function effectively. However, Bacon's series is dependent on the tradition of seated papal portraits and the institutional identity of the Papacy and Roman Catholic Church.

Despite being an atheist, Bacon painted religious subject matter. Taking the artist's personal beliefs into consideration, Bacon's disturbing papal variations can be regarded as a visual critique of the Papacy. Curator Chris Stephens claimed "He was passionately atheist and saw that as the key thing about living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He set out to express what it is to be alive when God does not exist—(when) man is just an animal."<sup>24</sup> Bacon's papal series, like Velázquez' interaction with earlier papal portraiture, maintains some continuity with Velázquez while reinterpreting his stylistic depiction of the human form. Innovation yet again challenges tradition. For example, Bacon's *Figure With Meat* (1954) (Figure 11) takes Velázquez' use of subdued stark backgrounds and pushes it even further away from traditional, naturalistic representation. As with almost all of Bacon's papal portraits, the artist places the Pope in a vacant black space where depth is alluded to by loosely demarcated thin pale lines of paint. By depicting this particular kind of background, Bacon gives greater visual emphasis to the Pope, creates additional psychological discomfort in the viewer, establishes an environment of timelessness, and alludes to a sketchy/unfinished quality emphasized throughout his work, words, and process. The artist's handling of paint recalls Velázquez' economy of paint. Tight brushstrokes leading to a sophisticated rendering of form are not found in

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<sup>24</sup> Jill Lawless. "A Retrospective of Horror." *Columbia Missourian*: 19 September 2008.

either artist's work. Again, Bacon reinterprets *Pope Innocent X* by distilling Velázquez's style. Bacon's paint, composed in thin layers and textured with the artist's personal articles of clothing strewn about the studio, allows the black background to penetrate the Pope, throne, and vestments. The Pope, rather than exemplifying papal authority, screams in pain and victimization.

#### Bacon's Papal Variations and their Spectatorial Effect on their Audience

Almost all of Bacon's popes look paralyzed. Unable to move or save themselves, their twisted hands tightly grip the arms of the papal chair. Additionally, all of Bacon's papal variations portray only one figure—the Pope. While the majority of the artist's oeuvre revolves around the sole figure, the impact of Bacon's compositional focus on one figure deepens the painting's psychological effect on the viewer. The audience can visually locate the victim, but not the perpetrator. Elaine Scarry analyzes conventions of torture in her text *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.<sup>25</sup> In it, she recognizes that one of the most significant driving factors of torture is complexity and the paradoxical nature of the pain. The threat of pain is most effective, in terms of instilling fear in the recipient, when unable to directly understand their perpetrator.<sup>26</sup> To support her assertion, Scarry refers to blindfolding, isolation, and changing attitudes in the aggressor.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 51-59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 165-168.

Bacon's papal portraits function in a parallel manner to Scarry's analysis of torture and pain. The interaction between the viewer and the subject in Bacon's variations is direct however, details of the encounter are purposely muddled. The artist's papal series pose the question: Who is causing the pain? In response, the papal portraits provide only two disturbing options. Either the pain experienced by the Pope is self-inflicted or the viewer is the cause. Scarry's assertion of the cycle of torture and its dependence on ambiguity of the source of the pain can be visually understood through the papal variations. Since it cannot be accurately charted to a specific instrument or person, the unclear origin of the pain inflicted on the Pope results in the circulation of blame. The viewer feels dual discomfort. The Pope's distorted and contorted form conveys pain that leads to sympathetic responses. However, the empathy felt by the audience turns in on themselves. Perhaps they are the cause of the pain; maybe it is their fault. Exceeding stereotypical issues of Catholic guilt, the viewer feeds into their own painful activity of viewing and internally conceptualizing the work. Scarry notes that often in torture activity the victim feels as if they are justly receiving punishment for behavior or information. Functioning much like this psychological self-infliction of pain and guilt, Bacon's papal portraits cause the self-infliction of discomfort visually and emotionally. The relationship between the Pope and the audience simultaneously operates as a continuation and disruption from the conventions of traditional seated papal portraits. In the same traditional vein, Bacon's papal portraits convey the emotive and spiritual power of the Pope. The Pope, through Bacon's paintings, causes the viewer to question their relationship with the Catholic Church. The power of the Papacy is maintained, despite the pained, disfigured Pope, through the viewer's general familiarity of the seated papal

portrait type. The Pope, as a mediator between the spiritual and earthly realm, can be read as a passer of judgment on the moral and religious fiber of Christian believers.

Bacon's Pope still conveys his character of critical judgment. However, the visible pain experienced by the blurred, pale, transparent Pope communicates a character of weakness and emphasizes the brevity of life. Consequently, Bacon's papal variations integrate the psychological complexity of both the portrayed and the audience. Velázquez' interest in the psychology of the sitter is pushed further by Bacon's appropriation. Bacon diametrically shifts the tradition of casual papal portraits away from its initial purpose. Bacon's papal series exposes the helplessness and violence of the papacy instead of the strong propagandistic façade of Roman Catholic authority found in earlier papal depictions.

Bacon's artistic process also plays an important role in understanding his papal series in relationship to the art-historical canon and tradition of seated papal portraiture. Importantly, the artist directly examined photographic reproductions (Figures 46-49) of Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X* while working at 7 Reece Mews. By using reproductions of the original painting, Velázquez' seventeenth-century papal portrait loses its original context. The official seated portrait no longer purely operates as a symbol of power of the Roman Catholic Church but is opened up to an infinite range of meanings. The image is extended past Rome and out of the control of the patron and artist. 7 Reece Mews, with its unorganized collection of disparate images, creates almost accidental juxtapositions within its walls.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the photographic nature of Bacon's exposure to *Pope*

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<sup>28</sup> This accidental quality has been linked to surrealism and Bacon's thoughts on chance. For more information, see Harrison, *In Camera*.

*Innocent X* further disconnects the image from its original context. This de-contextualization process gave Bacon's work additional distance from the tradition of papal portraiture. His process and psychological interpretation of *Pope Innocent X* is dependent on images of an earlier painting, rather than the personal exchange between artist and sitter. Thus, Bacon's process asserts the importance of the historical tradition of depicting the human form, not the wishes of the patron or sitter.

Bacon's appropriation of such a prominent work in the history of art requires understanding the artist's relationship with the art-historical canon. Art history has tended to situate Bacon as a bohemian artistic genius, a position further bolstered by texts that highlight his outsider behavior and so-called "violence" in his art. In older writings on Bacon, he is continually asserted as a personality whose personal obsessions and psychological makeup dictate his art. His interest in Velázquez' *Pope Innocent X*, according to these types of sources, has little to do with his relationship with the canon and more to do with his unresolved relationship with his father or an uncontrollable fixation.<sup>29</sup> However, it appears that stylistically, Velázquez' psychological focus and Bacon's expressionist impulse in portraiture shifted the accepted artistic modes for depicting the human form. Thus, Bacon's papal variations should be read as continuing and evolving the tradition of seated papal portraiture originating with Raphael's portrayal of Julius II.

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<sup>29</sup> Schmied, *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict*.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that Bacon's papal variations exemplify his appropriation of fragmented photographic material within his idiosyncratic artistic process of painting. This working process relied heavily on repetition and fragmentation of images within his large photographic collection to engage issues of originality and identity. I believe with additional studies on Bacon's process, scholars will shift their attention from his biography to his artistic technique.

My thesis focused on one significant grouping within Bacon's oeuvre, however, additional thematic examinations need to occur, such as his use of animals and bodies in motion. Bacon's work is often discussed broadly because of his repetition of themes, iconographic markers, and engagement with figurative painting however, these themes must function uniquely. Perhaps, further investigation of his textual sources, recently archived by the Hugh Lane Gallery, might allude to narratives, mythic, or literary themes within his paintings. He was well read and often referred to poetry as the starting point for some of his paintings such as *Triptych Inspired by T. S. Eliot's Poem "Sweeney Agonistes"* (1967). Understanding Bacon's papal variations as a unified series and outlining their iconographic and stylistic similarities and differences points to the artist's aesthetic innovations, in addition to his adherence to the conventions of traditional seated

papal portraiture. Interestingly, despite his strong beliefs in atheism and lack of formal commission by the papacy for his series, one of the artist's papal variations, *Study for a Portrait III* (1961) hangs among other modern, religious paintings in the Vatican. Its placement in a site marking the artistic and spiritual pinnacle of Roman Catholicism attests to the art-historical canon's placement of Bacon's series with the genre of "official" seated papal portraiture as well as the Church's acceptance of the artist's derivations.

However, late in his artistic career, Bacon said of his papal series, "I really consider it a mistake to have done those paintings. I was haunted by that work, by the reproductions I saw of it. It's such an extraordinary portrait that I wanted to do something based on it...I felt overwhelmed by that image. Unfortunately, the result was far from satisfactory."<sup>1</sup> Failure or not, Bacon's series creates dialogue with the tradition of papal portraits by the way he engages with the subject, the continues to influence artists today such as Jake and Dinos Chapman appropriation of Francisco Goya's print work, continuing the historical dialogue between artists and tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon in Conversation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 157-159.

## APPENDIX

## FIGURES



Figure 1: Photograph of Francis Bacon's Studio at 7 Reece Mews, South Kensington, London





Figure 2: Diego Velázquez, *Pope Innocent X*, 1650

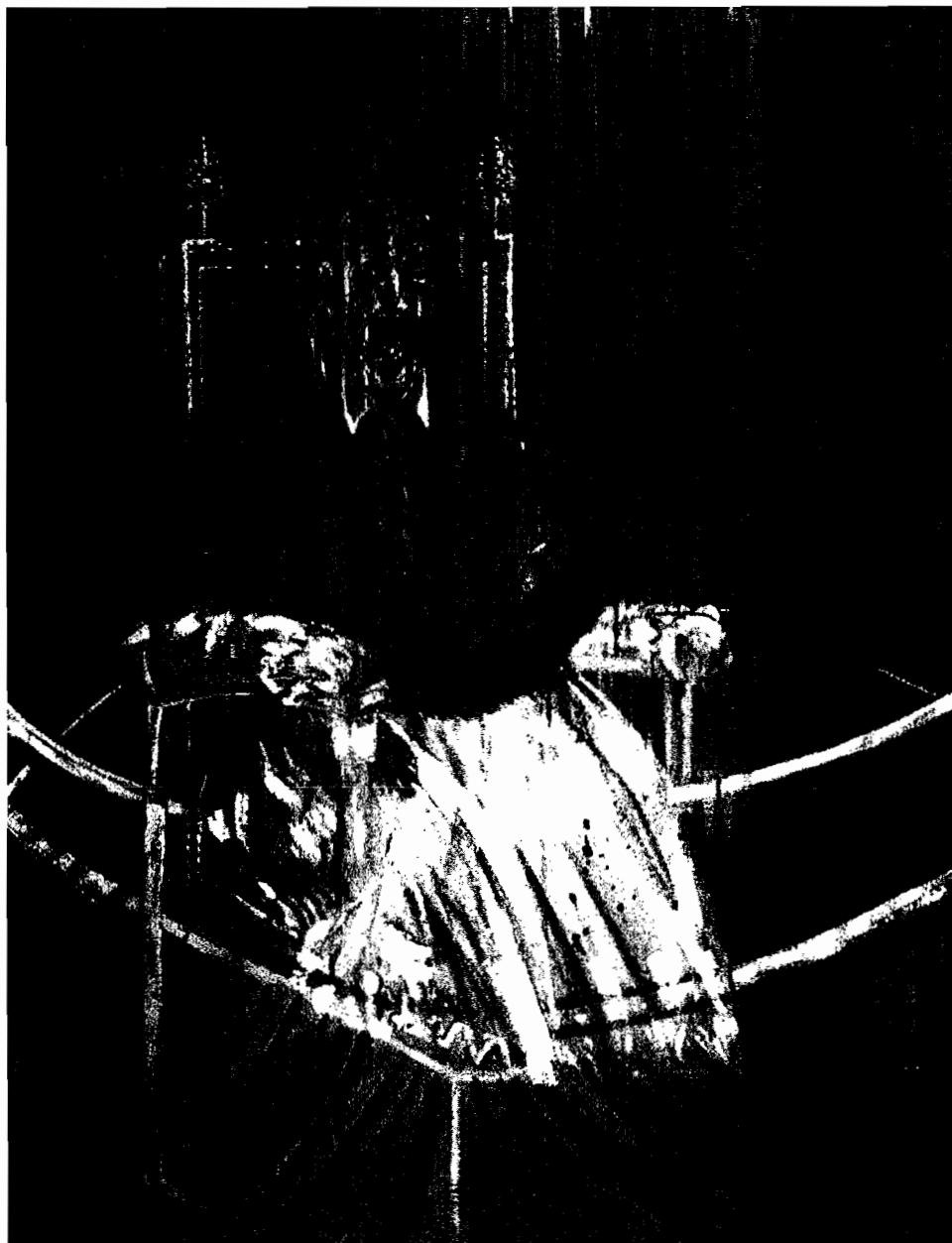


Figure 3: Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953



Figure 4: Francis Bacon, *Study (Pope Pius XII)*, 1955

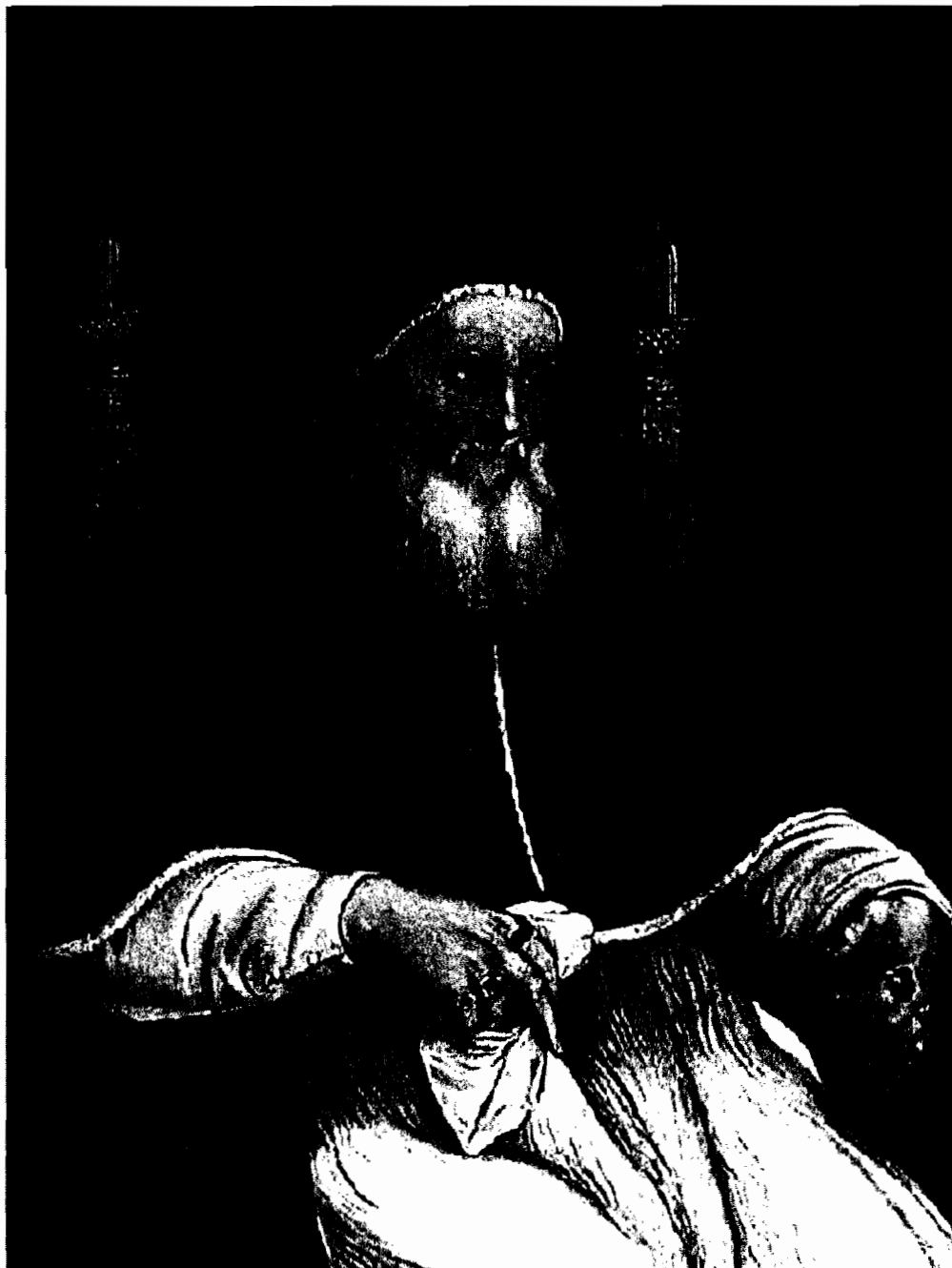


Figure 5: Raphael, *Julius II*, 1511



Figure 6: Alberto Giacometti, *Walking Man II*, 1960



Figure 7: Alberto Giacometti, *Sketch of Pope Innocent X*, 1936



Figure 8: Francis Bacon, *Study for a Head of a Screaming Pope*, 1952



Figure 9: Francis Bacon, *Study for a Pope*, 1955





Figure 10: Francis Bacon, *Study (Imaginary Portrait of Pope Pius XII)*, 1955



Figure 11: Francis Bacon, *Figure with Meat*, 1954



Figure 12: Francis Bacon, *Head VI*, 1949



Figure 13: Francis Bacon, *Study of Red Pope*, 1962, 1971

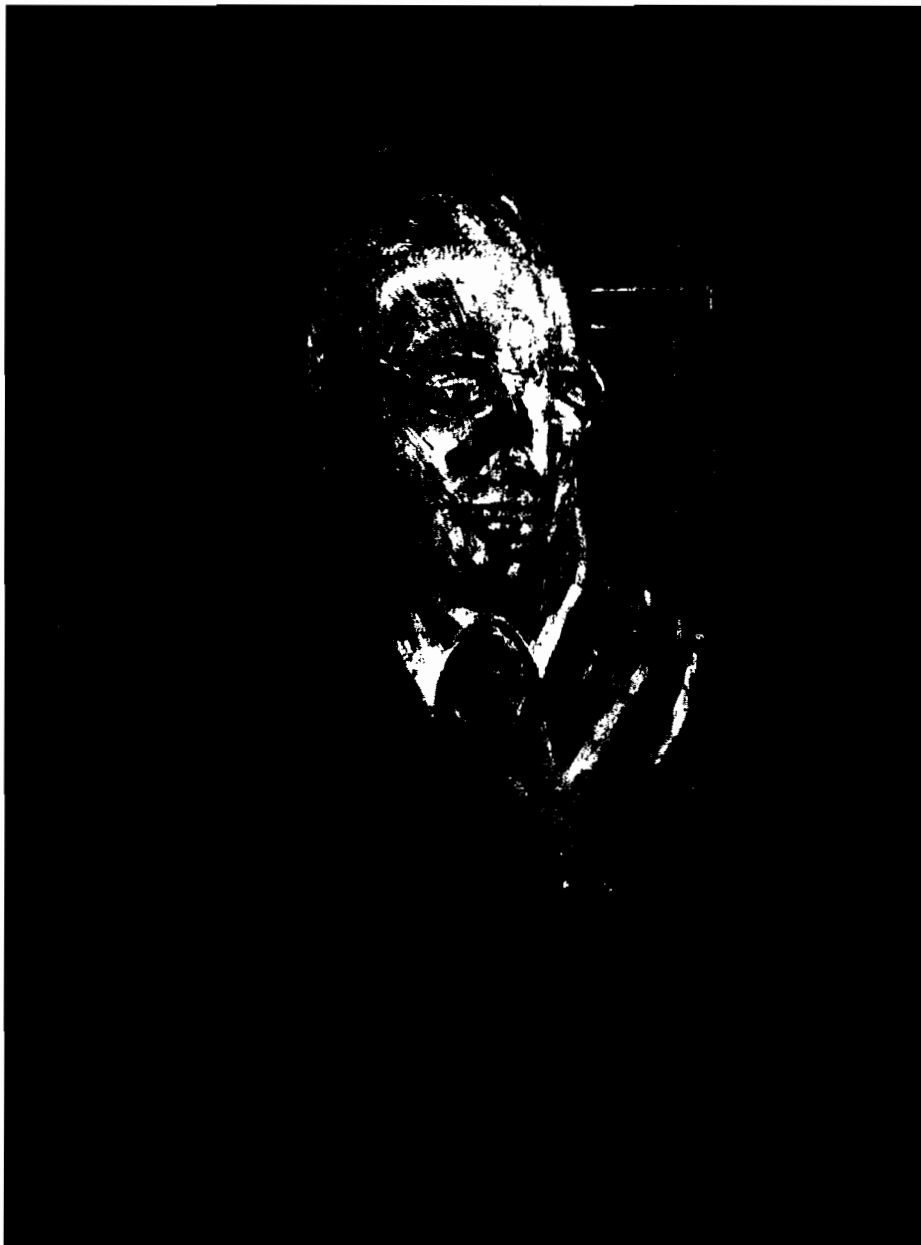


Figure 14: Francis Bacon, *Study for a Pope*, 1955

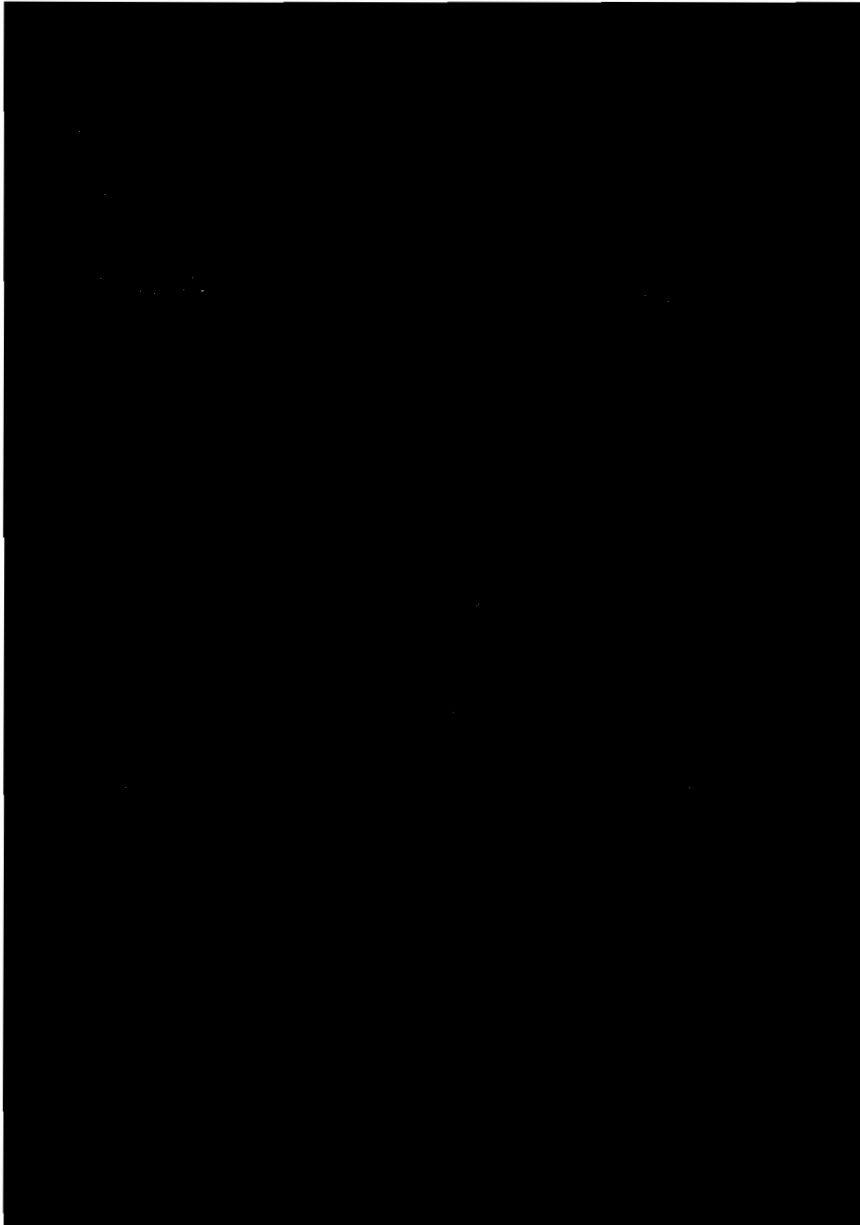


Figure 15: Francis Bacon, *Portrait of a Cardinal I (Pope I)*, 1955



Figure 16: Francis Bacon, *Seated Figure (Red Cardinal)*, 1960



Figure 17: Francis Bacon, *Pope I*, 1951





Figure 18: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1965



Figure 19: Francis Bacon, *Figure Seated (The Cardinal)*, 1955



Figure 20: Titian, *Pope Paul Farnese*, after 1546



Figure 21: Sebastiano del Piombo's Studio, *Pope Clement VII*, 1531-32



Figure 22: Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez*, 1950



Figure 23: Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez II*, 1950



Figure 24: Francis Bacon, *Pope II (Pope Shouting)*, 1951



Figure 25: Francis Bacon, *Pope III (Pope with Fan Canopy)*, 1951



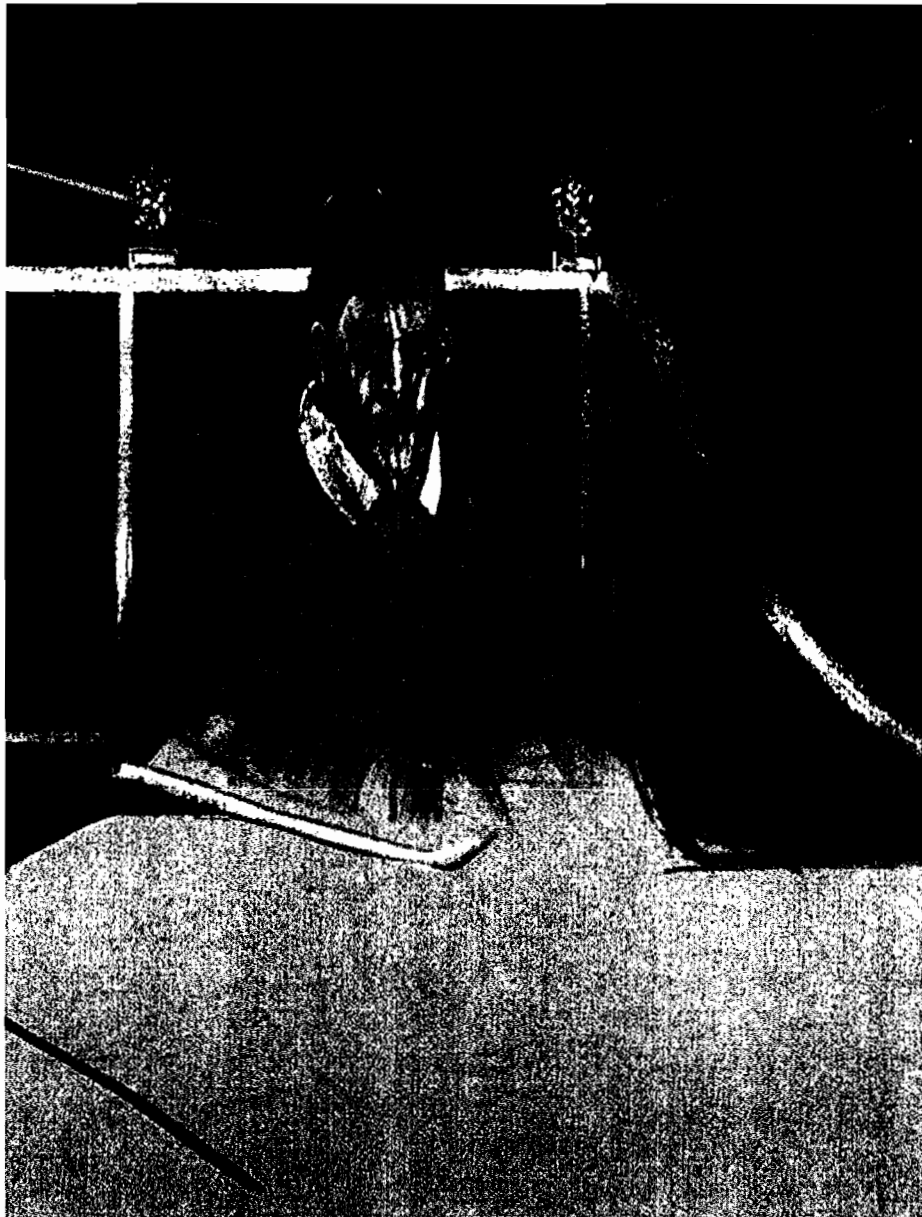


Figure 26: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait I*, 1953



Figure 27: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait II*, 1953



Figure 28: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait III*, 1953

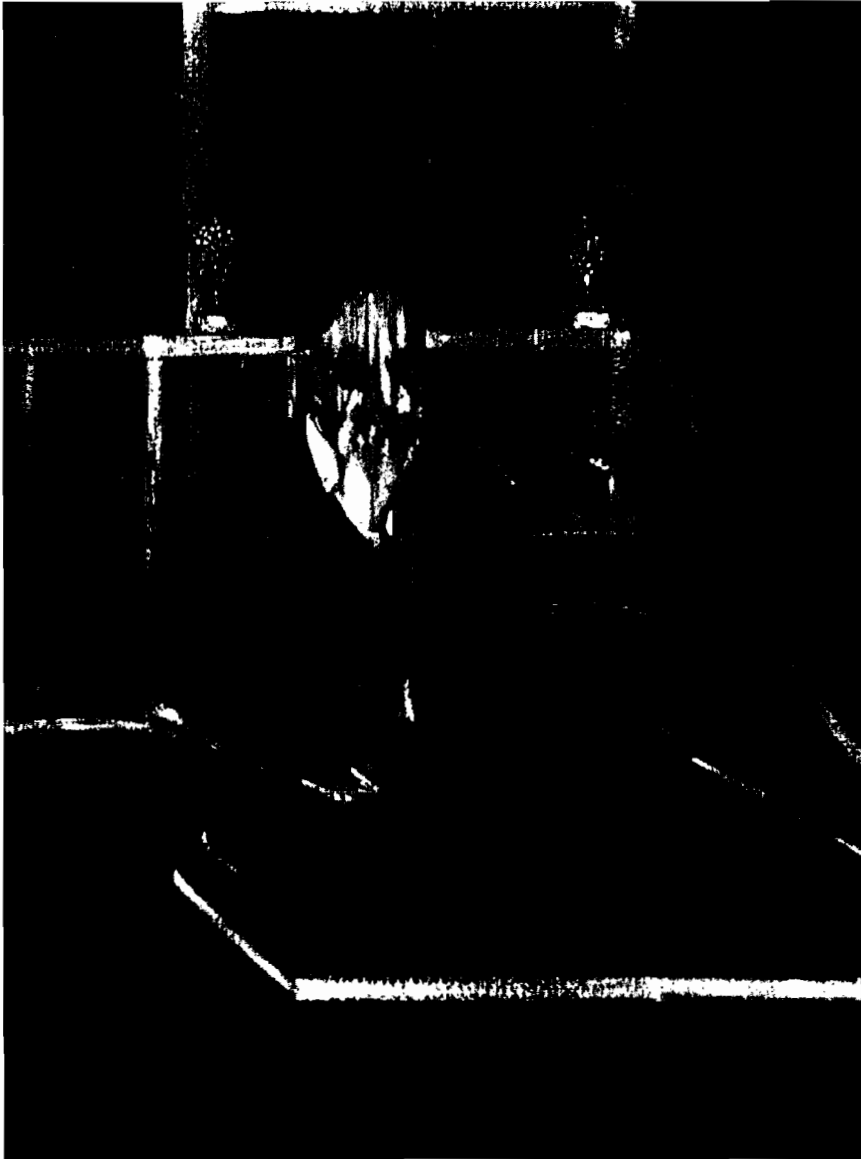


Figure 29: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait IV*, 1953



Figure 30: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait V (Cardinal V)*, 1953



Figure 31: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait VI*, 1953

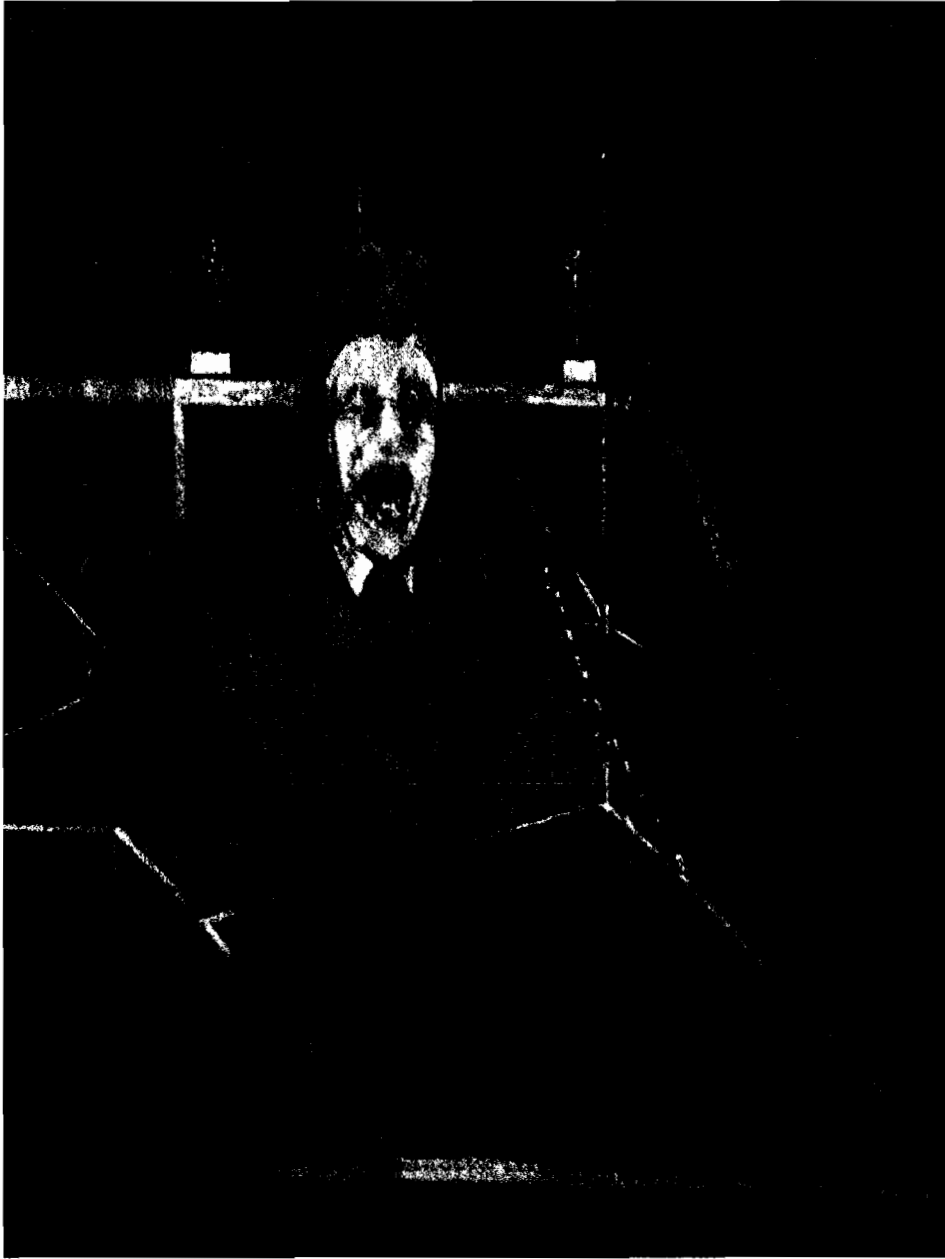


Figure 32: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait VII*, 1953



Figure 33: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait VIII*, 1953



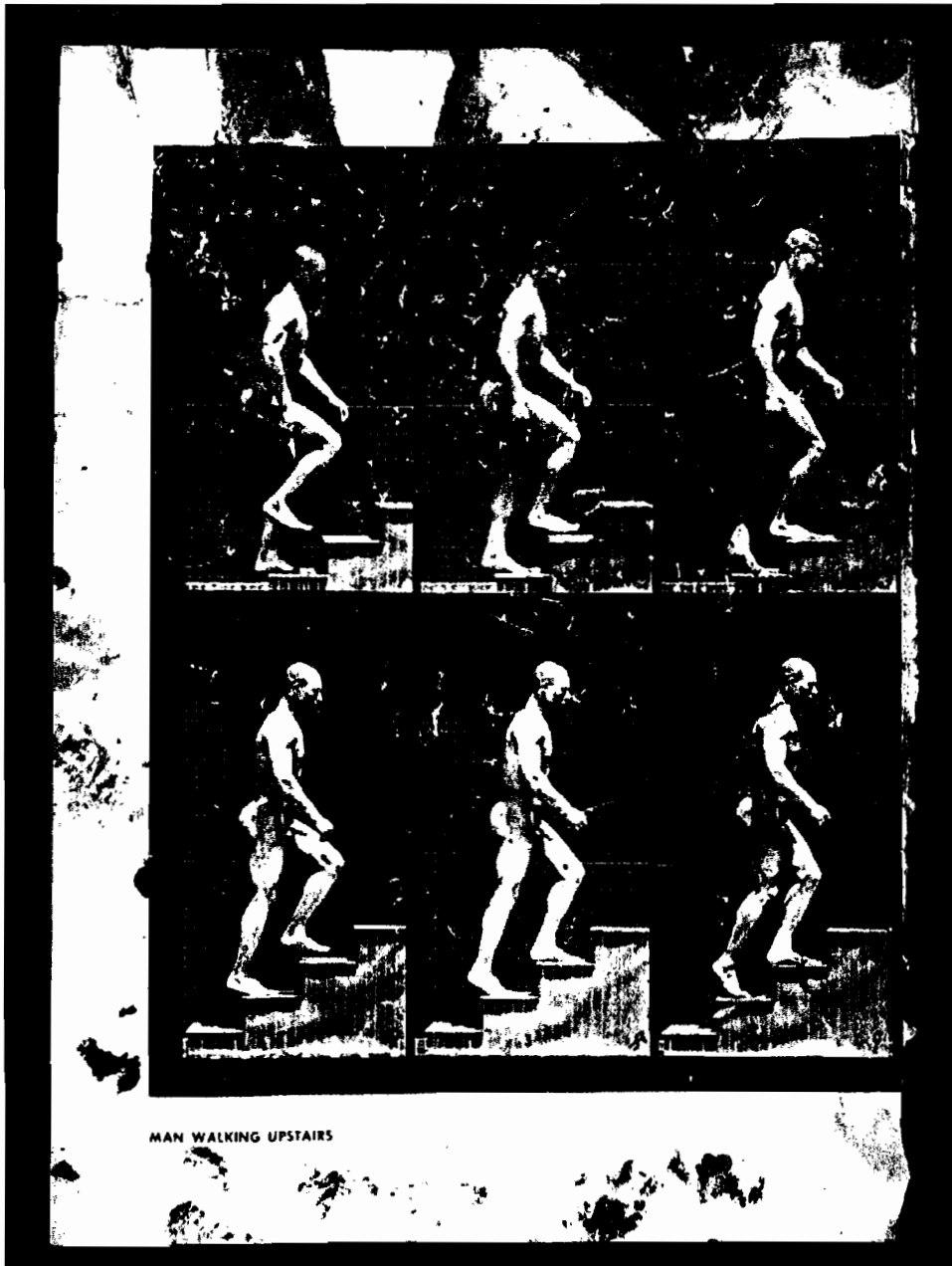


Figure 34: Working Document, Muybridge Motion Study



Figure 35: Working Document Photograph by John Deakin of George Dyer in Soho



Figure 36: Francis Bacon, *Study for Head of George Dyer*, 1967



Figure 37: Francis Bacon, *Pope II*, 1960



Figure 38: Chaim Soutine, *Carcass of Beef*, 1925



Figure 39: Working Document Illustration of Meat



Figure 40: Francis Bacon, *Pope and Chimpanzee*, 1962



Figure 41: Working Document Film Still from the Battleship Potemkin





Figure 42: Francis Bacon, *Second Version of 'Study for the Red Pope 1962,'* 1971



Figure 43: Unknown, *Copy After Velázquez' Pope Innocent X*



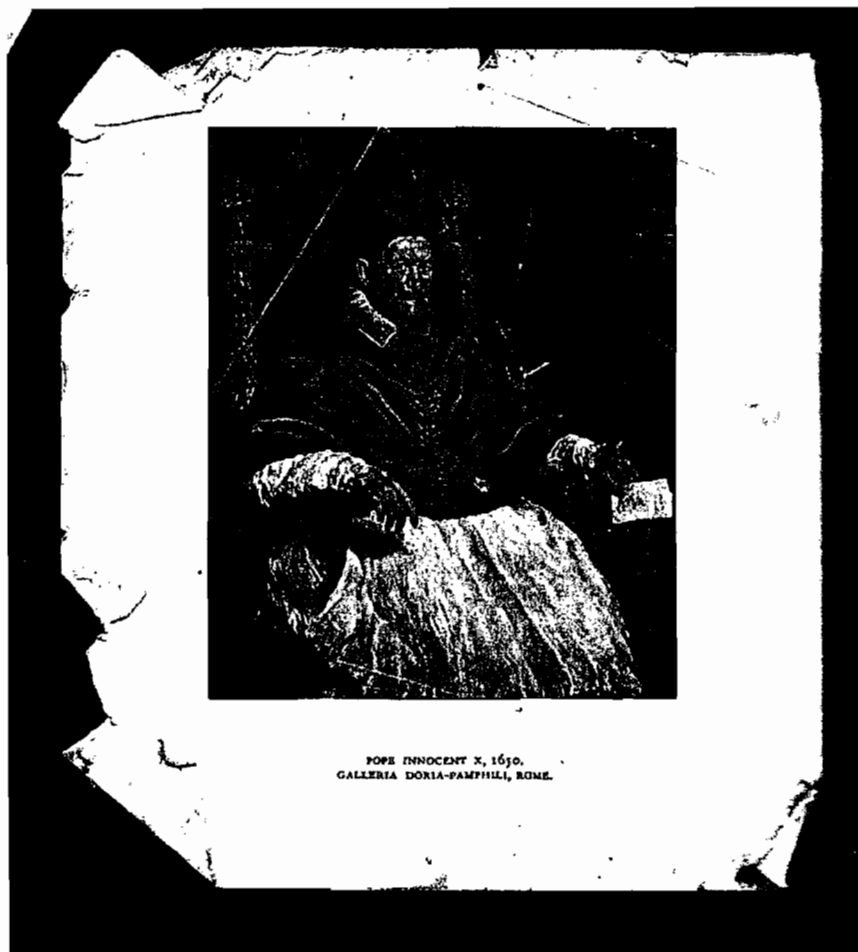
Figure 44: Pope Innocent X Working Document 1



Figure 45: Pope Innocent X Working Document 2



Figure 46: Pope Innocent X Working Document 3



POPE INNOCENT X, 1650.  
GALLERIA DORIA-PAMPHILI, ROME.

Figure 47: Pope Innocent X Working Document 4



Figure 48: Working Document, Radiography



FIG. 64. AUTHOR'S FIRST FLASHLIGHT PHOTOGRAPH, 7 JANUARY, 1912.

Figure 49: Working Document, Phenomena of Materialisation





Figure 50: Working Document, Battleship Potemkin, Odessa Steps

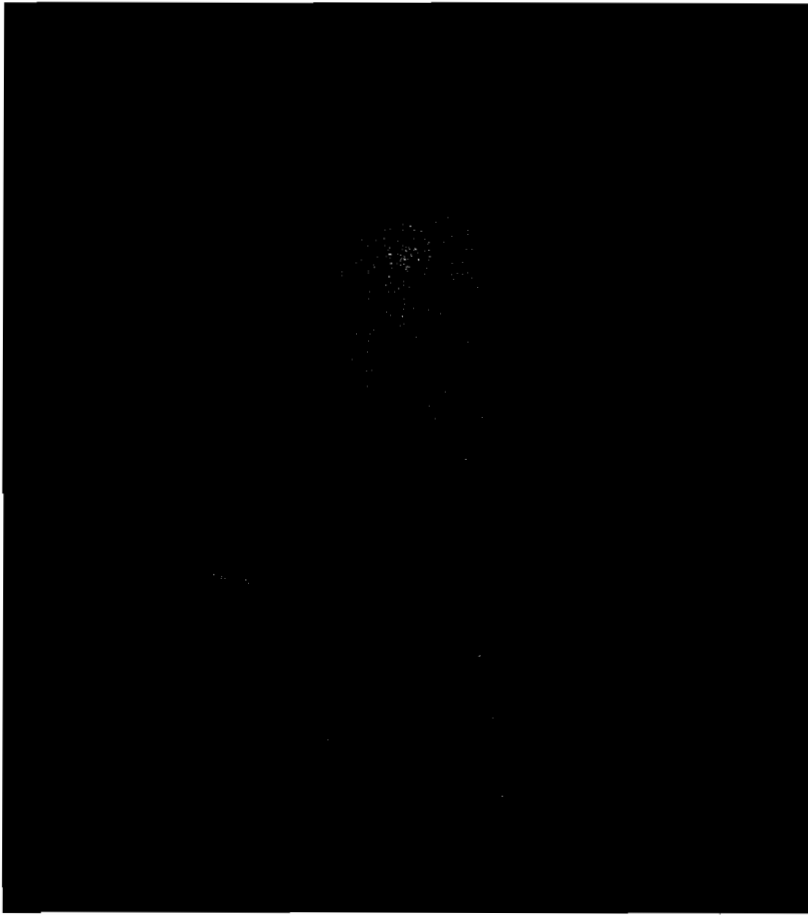


Figure 51: Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Philip IV of Spain*, 1625



Figure 52: Diego Velázquez, *The Rokeby Venus*, 1647-1651



Figure 53: Edouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian*, 1867-68

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